

# Graham **HURLEY** **back story**

Faraday & Winter



## *Backstory*

Faraday & Winter [0]

Hurley, Graham

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"Backstory" is a book-length companion piece to the critically-acclaimed and commercially successful series of crime fiction novels set in Portsmouth and featuring D/I Joe Faraday and D/C Paul Winter. I wrote it in response to literally hundreds of e-mails from readers wanting to find out more about the books. Where do they come from? Why do they feel so real, so authentic? In short, what does it take to turn the small print of sharp-end CID work in one of the UK's roughest cities into page-turning drama? All this - and much, much more - lie within these pages.

*Backstory*

*Graham Hurley*

In memory

of

Bob Franklin

*1945 - 2012*

*Look hard at a grain of sand and one day you'll figure out  
the shape of the whole coastline.*

- James Lee Burke

### *Introduction*

This is a book that sort of happened by accident. On speaking engagements and through my website I started meeting readers with a genuine interest in finding out a great deal more about Joe Faraday and his world. The books themselves, of course, are littered with clues but the nature of these questions hinted at something else, something extra: where did all this stuff come from? How come it feels so real, so accurate? And what kept you going from book to book once you'd started?

In a way, this kind of curiosity was deeply flattering. It meant, at the very least, that the books were working. But the more I thought about those conversations, the more they aroused my own curiosity. Every

book is a journey. A series of twelve can take you places you've never dreamed of. So why not write about that journey? If only to try and understand its real implications?

And so began *Backstory*. As a born hoarder, I'd hung onto all my research notes. Just the act of re-reading these scribbled impressions – of people, of procedures, of active investigations – took me back to my first faltering steps into the sharp-elbowed world of crime fiction, and as I got deeper into the first chapter I began to enjoy myself. Not only that, but as the shape of the journey started to emerge, I realised something else: that I'd spent the last decade in the company of characters that had become both real and important. I owed these people not simply my living but something else I could only hope to capture, or even understand, by writing a book length account.

Part of this discovery, of course, has to do with being a writer, working the rough clay of real life into what publishers love to call “page-turning drama”. Not for a moment would I minimise the difficulties of a challenge like this, and I hope that *Backstory* turns out to be a useful read for aspiring writers as well as committed fans. But the truth is that the Faraday books matter to me in personal ways I could never have suspected when I embarked on the journey and it's only now that I'm beginning to understand why.

People I respect tell me that novelists should never use their own work, consciously or otherwise, to resolve tangles and bewilderments in their own lives. Having completed *Backstory*, I can only say they're wrong.

## One

Yonks ago, when I was still in my twenties, I spotted an ad in *Screen* magazine. The ad had been placed by a company called Crawford Productions, in Australia, and they were looking for writers to join their long-running series, *Homicide*. At the time, I'd just spent a year or so making TV documentaries – one film every three weeks – and I fancied a break. I posted off some TV drama scripts I'd done, attended an interview in London, and got the job.

By mutual agreement, the contract was for six months. Crawfords flew me out to Melbourne, found me an apartment, and assigned me a desk on their production floor. The salary was generous because umpteen people were waiting on your script but if you got to final draft a week or two early, you scored a handsome bonus. That was fine because I happen to work very fast but the real challenge was the so-called “super bonus”. This was a prize that awaited the scriptwriter who came up with a totally novel murder. After five hundred plus episodes, it was reckoned that *Homicide* had pretty much exhausted all the available options.

And so I spent a very happy couple of months sitting on the tram into work trying to fathom how to kill the guy, or the woman, or the child across the aisle in a way that had so far eluded dozens of *Homicide* screen writers. This turned out to be a tougher assignment that you might expect but then I met a Kiwi my age who'd just returned from three years in the jungles of New Guinea, working as a patrol officer. We got drunk one night and he started telling me about the Sanguma Palm thorn.

Despite industrial helpings of Guinness, I knew at once that this was the super bonus. It works like this. One tribe falls out with

another. The feud centers on a particular guy. His enemies invite him to a feast, get him blind drunk on spirits distilled from wood bark or piri-piri fruit or whatever else they drink in New Guinea, and then – while he's sleeping it off – they insert the needle-like thorn of the Sanguma Palm tree in that little triangle of softness at the base of the neck. The thorn is so thin it leaves no entry mark. Over the coming weeks, it works its way deeper and deeper into the chest cavity until it punctures the lung. Infection sets in. Nothing can be done. Days later, your enemy dies in agony. Perfect.

Next morning, hung-over, I headed for Melbourne's botanical gardens. From documentary-making, I knew already that nothing resists the determined researcher. I made friends with one of the gardeners who led me to a Sanguma Palm tree and lent me his ladder. The thorns, as promised, looked like the business end of black hypodermics. I broke one off, wrapped it in a page from my notebook, and headed back to work. Six weeks later, *Upcountry* went into production. The super bonus, sadly, turned out to be Oz street rumour.

This, as it happens, was my first real encounter with crime fiction but it happened on the other side of the planet. As a writer on *Homicide* you stepped into a ready made cast of characters and dreamed up ways of keeping them busy enough to sustain the umpteen commercial breaks that punctuated every hour. It was a deeply pleasant introduction to Oz but it always felt like a fantasy. There were proper cops out there in the Melbourne 'burbs but it never crossed my mind to try and meet any. *Homicide* went down really well nation-wide at prime time on a midweek night. Fans knew exactly what to expect. Why bother with the real thing?

After my six months were up, I returned to making documentaries in the UK. Since I can remember I'd always wanted to be a writer, and had five mercifully unpublished manuscripts in my bottom drawer to prove it, but television is the sweetest of temptations and it didn't take much to succumb. Then, a decade later, came another interlude. I found myself afloat on a converted Hull trawler in the middle of the Atlantic, trying to find the wreck of the *Titanic*. We did it

in the end, and made a decent film as a result, but the assignment lasted weeks and weeks before we could get down to business and those long days of dragging a black and white camera across an empty seabed took me back to the typewriter.

The result was a submission for a six-part TV drama series called *Rules of Engagement*. It was fun to write, and offered a rich contrast to the world of documentary-making, but the best news of all was a two-book contract from Pan Macmillan. The first of these tomes, naturally enough, was the novelisation of the TV series.

More contracts followed. By the time I finally left TV, in 1991, I had four titles on the shelf, and just enough bookshop cred to try and turn novel-writing into a full-time occupation. In publishing-speak, these were “international thrillers”, big fat stand-alone paperbacks you might buy at an airport if you had a long flight ahead of you and nothing better to read. Each book offered a new cast of characters and a satisfyingly blank canvas. As a writer I could take these pretend people anywhere I chose. I set them tests by means of a plot and spent weeks at my PC wondering how they’d cope as the fictional pressures mounted. Some sank without trace. Others stayed afloat. Some even made it to the final page. It was control freakery gone mad and I loved it.

After seven outings with Pan/Mac, I accompanied my editor – Simon Spanton – to Orion. They offered me a two-book contract which I happily accepted. Both these stories were voiced by female characters, a fictional liberty I much enjoyed, and Orion seemed happy enough with what they were getting. Then came a summons to London.

Simon was at the lunch and so was Orion’s managing director, Malcolm Edwards. I was out of contract at this point, and was pitching for another two stand-alones. I’d already written 50,000 words of the first one. The working title was *Fastnet*, and both Simon and Malcolm had had plenty of time to read it.

It takes time to get round to business at lunches like these. Finally, I asked them about *Fastnet*. This was a thriller spun around the yacht race from Cowes, to the Fastnet Rock (off southern



Ireland), and thence back to Plymouth. The plot involved a murder, a savage storm, a capsized boat, and a complex investigation (roughly in that order). This time round, it wasn't narrated by a woman.

Malcolm answered the two key questions. Yes, he liked it. No, Orion wasn't going to publish it. This, as you might imagine, was a bit of a blow. I'd always imagined that authors with a sizeable backlist could swap publishers with gay abandon. To date, I had eleven published titles to my name. Selling *Fastnet* elsewhere, therefore, shouldn't have been a problem. Wrong. If Orion didn't intend to publish the thing, any new suitor is going to want to know why. And it's at this point that the difficult conversations would begin.

Malcolm, though, hadn't finished. Both *Nocturne* and *Permissible Limits* had achieved decent sales but he felt Orion could do better by re-positioning me in the marketplace. Lately, they'd built a very healthy sales record in something he described as "the fastest growing sector in commercial fiction". With American authors like Michael Connolly and Harlan Coben, plus home-grown talent like Ian Rankin, Orion had become a regular presence in the Top Ten. My heart fell. Malcolm was talking crime fiction.

I wanted to know exactly what he had in mind. A three-book contract, he said (normal contracts are two-book), set in Portsmouth, the city where Lin and I had been living for more than a decade. Pompey, as the locals call it, has few fans in the tight little world of London publishing but Malcolm – with some courage – had decided to try and turn this distaste to our mutual advantage. He spelled out the challenge. I was to invent a home-grown cop. I was to root him in the city I loved. I was to build at least three books around an ensemble of characters. And I was to try and deliver the kind of readership that had taken Rankin's Inspector Rebus to the very top of UK crime fiction. No pressure.

That afternoon, I sat on the train back to Pompey wondering what on earth I was going to do. Despite my adventures in Melbourne I didn't much like crime fiction, and I certainly didn't read it. The fridge, on the other hand, would empty very fast without a new contract and I had a limited appetite for going back to making TV documentaries, the

only other job for which I was remotely qualified.

A number of my ITV ex-colleagues were still in the game but the reports they brought back from the front line painted an ugly picture. Everything had been casualised. Documentary-making had become a business. The queues for face-time with the all-powerful commissioning editors extended around the block. The editors themselves were barely out of their teens. Production budgets had been slashed to the bone. Something called “Reality-TV” was the hot genre, an industry-wide codeword for cheap. In short, the race to the bottom had begun.

Did I want any of this? I didn’t. Would they ever have me? Highly unlikely.

Lin and I went to the pub that night. By now, I’d concluded that if we were to live with a fullish fridge, I had two choices. On the one hand I could descend on the library, borrow an armful of titles, and bury myself in other peoples’ crime fiction. This prospect filled me with gloom. Not only did I not want to read this stuff but if I did I’d probably end up writing crap pastiche, exactly what Malcolm Edwards *didn’t* want.

The other option was more beguiling. As a documentary producer, I’d always loved the first stage in the production cycle: getting alongside people, winning their trust, finding out what makes them tick, exploring the kinds of lives they’d made for themselves. This, in essence, is exactly the business of the working novelist and over the past decade I liked to think that research for TV documentaries had taught me a thing or two about listening, and watching, and trying to imagine life as someone else. What if I spent some time with working detectives? Tried to figure out what made them tick? Tried to understand the world they’d made their own? Lin and I had a third pint and raised our glasses to Option Two. Game on.

But how to open the door to the magic box marked “CID”? This was never going to be easy. The only sharp-end detectives we really knew were a pair of fellow-quaffers, Pughie and J-R. They formed part of a tight knot of drinkers who gathered at the Wine Vaults, in Southsea’s Albert Road, every Monday after work. Lin and I would

wander down there sometimes and the evenings were a noisy mix of gossip, slander and multiple wind-ups. We drank a lot of beer, and had a fun time.

Both Pughie and J-R were seasoned detectives and were on intimate terms with the darker parts of Pompey but very little of this stuff ever surfaced on Monday nights. We were there to talk amiable nonsense, get bladdered and have a laugh or two. So how on earth was I going to finesse these piss-ups at the Wine Vaults into the kind of comprehensive research I needed to launch a cutting-edge crime series?

The only answer was to come clean. Detectives are canny, especially these two. They knew I wrote books and one or two of their mates had even read some but so far they'd no idea I was about to abandon international one-off thrillers and barge into their tight little world. I suggested a drink at another pub on another evening. Just the three of us. The pub was called the Eldon Arms. At six fifteen in the evening it was practically empty. The clue lay on the table between us. My notebook. And a pencil.

These two guys, between them, had maybe fifty years experience in the Job. Pughie had been a decent footballer and in certain lights, with his Italian good looks, he could still pass muster as a veteran from Serie "A". J-R was a hard-core Dylan fan and in his spare time he was beginning to make headway as an R&B promoter on the local music scene. He wore his hair long, tied in a pony tail, and had the good detective's knack of being able to tease a conversation out of pretty much anybody. Years later, when all the controversy kicked off about u/c officers going native with women from the protest movement, a lot of the mug shots of these guys reminded me of J-R. Was he u/c? I never found out. U/c, in case you're wondering, means undercover.

That first night in the Eldon wasn't easy. The moment we started talking it was obvious that the rules of engagement had changed. We were still mates but this was no longer a social occasion. They wanted more detail. They wanted to know that this thing was really going to happen. I assured them that it was but when I broke the news that all

three books were to be rooted locally, here in Pompey, there was an exchange of looks. No one was using the word trespass but this very definitely wasn't Monday night at the Wine Vaults.

I knew from other people that both Pughie and J-R had led colourful lives. More importantly, I'd sensed that their years at the coal-face in CID had bridged the gap between old-style detective work and a whole new culture of rights and responsibilities that, to put it mildly, could be a pain in the arse to can-do guys like these. And so that evening, I set out to explore the fault line between these two very different worlds. A generation ago, as I knew from a couple of documentaries I'd made, Pompey had been full of spirited detectives who'd regularly bend the rules in the hunt for a quick result. This process left lots of today's boxes completely un-ticked.

In that pre-PACE era, unrestrained by tightly-drawn new rules about evidence gathering, detectives didn't care a stuff about Risk Assessments or the Human Rights Act, largely because neither existed, and the notion of political correctness would have made them laugh. They were there to pot the scrotes and the low life. They worked an army of informants, laid elaborate traps and did their business in locked cells. None of this stuff necessarily guaranteed a totally fair outcome but they got results. Whether or not this made Pompey a nicer place to live in is not for me to say but the point is that it seemed to work. Some of these D/Cs became legendary thief-takers, as did some of their bosses. They also won themselves, amongst Pompey lowlife, a considerable degree of respect.

As it happens, I had a little hands-on experience of this myself. Back in the early seventies I'd regularly turned out for the Southern Television football team. One year we'd played a side from Southsea CID. Their centre forward was a detective called Dave Hopkins and my job that afternoon was to try and stop him scoring. Marking Dave Hopkins, it turned out, was a nightmare. He'd kick you to death when the ref wasn't looking. Most of his many goals were blatant off-sides. He had the sharpest elbows on the pitch and absolutely no time for the rules. Yet afterwards, in the bar, he was the nicest, funniest, warmest guy imaginable and hours later, still nursing your bruises,

you'd be wondering exactly how he managed to pull off a trick like that.

Dave Hopkins, I later discovered, was a D/C in the Pompey Drugs Squad. He worked under a D/S called Alan Russell, a quiet, reflective, hard-working skipper who in most respects was the reverse of his bandit D/C. Dave and I got to meet again because I was making a film about young junkies who'd got into serious trouble with heroin. It turned out that Dave had nicked pretty much all of them but what was truly remarkable was the fact that they all ended up thinking the world of him. Dave's MO, on and off the football field, was the same. It was means and ends. You laid traps, threatened, charmed, pressured, made promises, broke them, then kissed and made up. In short, you did everything that was necessary and got a result. Months later the stars of my little film were all banged up and tidied away yet they still loved him. Just how, once again, did Dave do it?

Twenty five years later, I found myself putting this question to Pughie and J-R in the Eldon Arms. We were only on our second pint, and I was only too aware how cautious they were still being, but mention of Dave Hopkins seemed to take us to a different place. By now Dave was dead, a victim of cancer, but they both agreed that his passing was a double shame, not simply because he'd gone before his time but because he was one of a certain kind of sharp-end detective for whom the Job would soon have no room. In this, they pointed out, we were all losers. Pughie and J-R because some of the colour had gone out of their professional lives. And us punters because – when push came to shove – the likes of Dave Hopkins truly did the business.

Some of that buccaneering spirit had clung to both J-R and Pughie and after I'd brought Dave Hopkins into the conversation they began to open up. I still have my scribbled notes from that evening. Morale at the coal face, they said, was shit. Zero resources, zero back up, and everything driven by performance targets. Handcuffed by umpteen procedural diktats, the odds were stacked against nailing the guys who really mattered.

The serious money in Pompey, they said, came from narcotics. By now they'd started giving me names I recognised, people I'd either

met personally or heard of through mates. These were guys for whom Pughie and J-R were Filth but the odd thing was the degree of grudging respect that both these detectives had for their MO. The top guys in the supply business organised themselves sensibly. They were sharp. They were canny. They paid for the best legal and financial advice and when it came to something more robust they relied on blokes they regarded as brothers-in-arms. These relationships extended city wide and had often been forged in the days of the notorious 6.57 crew, a bunch of hard-core scrappers who followed Pompey Football Club to away games the length and breadth of the kingdom. Now middle-aged, the guys who'd made it to the top were enjoying the proceeds from years of canny investment, mainly in cocaine and property. Against this, Pughie and J-R implied, the Filth didn't have a prayer.

This was more than interesting. J-R was nearing the end of his CID career. He'd nearly done his thirty and the more he talked, the more I realised he couldn't wait to get out. He'd had enough of stropky line managers, evil budget-holders, huge piles of paperwork, risk-averse bosses, and endless grief from a long list of hate figures including local politicians, Home Office civil servants, clueless graduate recruits, vindictive journos, carping wives, and a huge army of council tax payers – “customers” for fuck's sake - who couldn't wait to get stuck in about pisshead kids and all the other aggravations of the night-time economy. Was this why he'd become a copper? To get dicked around by the great unwashed?

At the end of the evening, out in the street, I asked him what he was going to do with the rest of his life. He peered at me under the lamplight. Was this a serious question? I said it was.

“Easy, mate.” He grinned. “Has to be drugs, doesn't it?”

“Why's that?”

“Zero chance of getting caught.”

I spent a long time thinking about that answer. J-R was talking about the guys at the top of the supply chain, not the low-life who pushed the stuff at street level, or the young junkies I'd met through my documentary work. He was describing a bunch of home-grown

Pompey lads who'd tasted the money to be made from ecstasy in the late eighties rave scene and had sensibly traded up to the laughing powder in the hunt for even fatter profits. I knew what cocaine had bought these guys. I'd seen the houses, the cars, the flash motor cruisers. I'd heard about the freebie invites to Premiership directors' boxes and the wild excursions to Marbella and Dubai. This was the kind of material that might find a place in my forthcoming crime novels. Not least because it felt so real.

That evening at the Eldon was a great start. I'd glimpsed what we scribes call a narrative arc – an on-going battle between the beleaguered forces of law and order and the teeming chaos out there in Pompeyland. But to do the coming three books proper justice I had, somehow, to find out a great deal more about the police. How their machine worked. The extent of its authority and reach. And how widely shared were the frustrations I'd picked up from Pughie and J-R. Only then could I go back to these two guys and squeeze them for a little more.

A couple of days later, I took a call from a voice I didn't recognise. He turned out to be the secretary of the local branch of an organisation called *Common Purpose*. I'd met this lot before. It's a charity with branches all over the country. Every year, they chose a cohort of thirty six men and women, selected in equal thirds from the public sector, the private sector and the voluntary sector. They meet for one long day each month for roughly the period of a year. Each of these days is themed – it might be economic affairs, or law and order, or education. Top speakers arrive from the four corners of the kingdom, address the delegates, and invite debate. For two or three years I'd been part of the *Common Purpose* Culture Day, talking about documentary film-making, but now the secretary had something else in mind.

"We've had someone drop out", he said. "Do you fancy coming on board with next year's lot?"

He meant as a delegate. I said that sounded fine. He said there was a price involved: £5,000. This enrolment fee, of course, is

normally paid by your sponsoring organisation – IBM, say, or the Royal Navy – but I had neither an employer nor five grand. The secretary wasn't convinced.

“Are you sure?”

I laughed. He obviously thought all authors were rich. When I confirmed there was no chance of me giving Common Purpose a cheque for £5,000 there was a brief silence. Then he said they might be able to offer some kind of scholarship as long as I paid something upfront. I asked how much. He wondered whether I could manage fifty.

“Fifty quid?”

“Yes.”

“Deal.”

Every *Common Purpose* year begins with the new boys (and girls) gathered at a local hotel. Ours was the Post House at the top of Hayling Island. The first morning was devoted to various ice-breaking exercises. One of them involved all thirty six of us sitting in a circle. You were asked to bring a small item of some personal significance, chuck it down there on the carpet, and then spend ten minutes or so explaining why it mattered so much.

My keepsake was a boarding card from Ethiopian Airways. A couple of years earlier, thanks to an invite from Oxfam, I'd spent some time in Angola, researching life amongst the minefields. Ethiopian Airways was by far the cheapest way of getting to Luanda. Hence the boarding card.

My time in Angola was all too brief but it made a huge impression. The country was in the middle of a vicious civil war and both sides were sowing minefields with gay abandon. Most of the victims out in the countryside were innocent civilians working the fields and many of them ended up in the country's capital, legless and sometimes armless, trying to beg a living amongst the gridlocked traffic. In a number of respects that experience of Angola had changed the way I looked at life, as I tried to explain to my new chums in one of the hotel's function rooms.



An hour or so later, I found myself in the restaurant, queuing for the buffet lunch. The guy ahead of me – tall, soft Canadian accent – turned round. He wanted me to remind him of the title of the book I'd written as a result of my Angolan adventures. It was called *The Perfect Soldier*, the squaddies' nickname for your average anti-personnel mine (never sleeps, never gets pissed, always works first time).

"*The Perfect Soldier*?"

"Yes."

"It's on my bedside table. I'm halfway through it."

I resisted the temptation to inquire how he was getting on. Instead, I asked him what he did for a living.

"I'm a copper," he said, "a uniformed superintendent. I run the northern half of the city."

"Here? In Pompey?"

"Sure."

We became friends. His name was Roly Dumont. He was, by common consent, a total one-off, highly unusual, one of those inspired gambles a bureaucracy can sometimes find itself making. As the top cop in Pompey North, Roly could open virtually any police door in the city. He had a keen, sceptical intelligence, and a teacher's gift for making complicated issues seem simple. He didn't suffer fools gladly, so you had to keep up, but he was passionate about crime fiction. If I was looking for a near-perfect introduction to my new fictional world, then here it was.

Over the following weeks, Roly offered me a senior copper's view of the city that was, though I didn't know it at the time, to sustain more than a million words of crime fiction. Whenever I stumbled over something I thought interesting, he'd make a phone call and arrange an introduction. Thanks to Roly, I began to understand about the importance of so-called passive data, anything from forensics to CCTV, from mobile billing to cell-site analysis. With each new twist in the plot came another door, another office, another face, and another hour of note-taking. A lot of this research was simply factual, me making sure I had the right bits of the jigsaw in the right place, but with

this sensible emphasis on procedure – the grammar of policing - came something subtler. Conversation by conversation I was slowly becoming aware of what it really felt like to be a working copper.

Pughie and J-R had been right. They'd never spelled it out, probably because they thought it too obvious, but policemen lived in a bubble of their own making. By definition, as law enforcers and gatherers of evidence, they'd staked out their own patch of territory slightly removed from the rest of us. The culture was indeed changing – both inside and outside the force – and as a direct result it was impossible not to pick up a whiff of paranoia.

These men and women had circled the wagons. Already, in three brief years, New Labour had brought in hundreds of new laws. Each had to be understood, interpreted, enforced. This might not matter to you or me but Blair's incessant courtship of the media filtered down through top Home Office civil servants and resulted in constant changes of tack out there on the street. One month the targeted offence might be domestic burglary. The next, vehicle theft. Then a *Daily Mail* leader would send countless uniforms in pursuit of infant shoplifters, or crack dealers, or rogue asylum seekers. Everything had to be logged, counted, analysed, gently spun, then despatched via force HQ to the honchos at the Home Office. Blair might have been enjoying the party of his dreams but at every level in the force it was impossible not to detect a sense of growing disenchantment. Whose tail was wagging whose dog? And how come these guys from London are pissing all over Pompey's lamp posts?

This isn't stuff that figures hugely in prime time cop drama. And neither should it. But it very definitely begun to shape itself as a subplot in my own little take on what contemporary policing was really about, not least because all these procedural changes – a direct result of New Labour's legislative incontinence – had begun to change the nature and the feel of the Job. This was daunting enough but its corollary was an even bigger challenge. Whoever my fictional lead-guys turned out to be, they had – in some small or large way – to reflect that change.

By now it was late spring and I was beginning to map the wiring

diagram that kept Pompey's CID operation together. Most enquiries, generated by so called "volume crime", were handled by teams of detectives at divisional level. These were the D/Cs that occupied large open offices and spent most of their time juggling a number of jobs as the tide of petty crime ebbed and flowed around the city. A typical caseload might include shoplifting, minor assaults, housebreaks, vehicle theft, and a whole range of drug-related offences. These sharp end detectives reported to Detective-Sergeants, or "skippers", who in turn did the bidding of a Detective Inspector, or D/I.

Already, after a number of conversations, I'd sensed that this was the desk my series hero would have to occupy, largely because it offered me – and hence my readers – a useful overview as the plot developed. A D/I on division was where the investigative buck stopped. This was the guy with his thumb in the dyke when it came to somehow containing the swamp of volume crime. This was the poor bastard who had to cope with all the bollocks about performance indicators and risk management while trying to put an ever-lengthening queue of delinquent kids and sundry low-life in court. If I was after someone on the edge of a nervous breakdown, I need look no further.

Major crime, on the other hand, was infinitely more sexy. Force-wide, there were three Major Crime Teams and the one responsible for the eastern part of the force area was based at Pompey's Kingston Crescent police station. Major crime was defined as murder, kidnap and stranger rape and I was gladdened to discover that our patch had generated no less than 12 killings over the past year and a half. The guy in charge was a Detective Superintendent called Steve Watts and Roly thought he'd be happy to see me.

I'd already heard about Steve Watts. J-R was a big fan. Wattsie, he said, was a detective's detective. Led from the front. Didn't put up with any crap from anyone. Lots of experience. Fair but tough as fuck.

I made a call and we arranged to meet. Steve occupied a big sunny office on the third floor of a block behind the police station. This was the heart of the Major Crime Team. There were photos of his kids on the window sill behind the L-shaped desk and a conference table with

space for eight chairs suggested a lot of meetings. A poster for Kosovo hung on the wall beside a couple of flip charts and a bookcase held bound copies of the Criminal Law Review. Steve himself sat behind the desk, shooting regular glances at his P/C screen. He was a big man, physically imposing, with a dry sense of humour and a taste for exquisite suits. His voice was low and he disliked having to repeat himself. If you were wise, you listened hard and wrote everything down. J-R was right. This wasn't a man with time to waste.

Our meeting that morning, the first of many, was central to my understanding of the way CID works. It turned out that my suspicions about the treadmill of volume crime were spot-on. The blokes on division, said Steve, had his fullest sympathies, especially the D/I in charge. Everything that was complicated, everything from child protection issues to the management of informants, ended up on his desk. He worked ball-breaking hours for very little reward. His only guarantee, the only thing he could be absolutely sure of, was that so-called "vol crime" would never go away. It was like the weather, or gravity. Pompey scrotes would never give up. Never. You could depend on it. Yet this same luckless divisional D/I was expected to drive the PI stats ever upward and somehow put a shine on the city's face.

The PI stats, of course, were the dreaded Performance Indicators, a set of yardsticks the Home Office used to benchmark individual forces. This was the cross that uniform and CID both had to bear, part of New Labour's determination to quantify and measure absolutely everything, but to Steve Watts' quiet satisfaction neither murder nor rape were subject to PIs. This I found puzzling. Why on earth not? Steve looked briefly troubled. Twat question. How on earth do you quantify evil?

For the next hour, he gave me a feel for the Major Crime machine. How the Major Incident Room down the corridor worked. The kind of difference the HOLMES 2 software had made, keeping tabs on a fast-expanding enquiry. How the Senior Investigating Officer's best friend was his Policy Book, a record of every decision he made. What the Receiver, and the Statement Reader, and the Actions Allocator did.

How an enquiry's Intelligence Cell was constantly scoping the forward radar, looking for promising lines of enquiry, constantly squeezing the orange until there was nothing left to know. How the theory and practise of interviewing came together in the PEACE formula (Preparation, Encounter, Account, Challenge, Evaluation). And why, at every stage of an investigation, everyone had to be thinking court. "We're evidence gatherers," he said. "And every single particle of that evidence has to be lawyer-proof."

Coming away from an interview like that, priceless in all kinds of ways, it was impossible not to be aware of the sheer size of the challenge I seemed to have taken on. For the first book, to kick off the series, I fancied putting my D/I on division. That way I could expose him to the rough and tumble of Pompey life, already a major feature of the books I had mind. Pressure is the working novelist's best friend and the D/Is I'd met for real had to cope with lots of it. After a couple of books, though, the development of the series might warrant a step upwards, into the world of Steve Watts, where a murder or a stranger rape might offer a little more in the way of job – and maybe plot – satisfaction. Either way, though, it was very obvious that I had to get the procedural small print right. Otherwise these conversations would be over.

It was at this point that I began to develop an interest in bird watching. Roly was a passionate birder. By now I was getting to know him a bit and I think I understood why. He had an innate gift for analysis and tabulation – getting things in the right columns and the right order – and this served him equally well in the office during working hours, and out in the field at weekends. He also had a talent for understanding the bigger picture: how a tiny detail can shed light on something important though apparently unrelated.

The appearance of a super-rare Long billed Murrelet in South Devon, for instance, can signal immense jet stream disturbances high in the stratosphere thousands of miles away because this little bird is a native of Eastern Russia and Japan and has no business to be chasing fish off Dawlish beach. These linkages fascinated me, as did the sheer depth of his knowledge. At dusk, in the depths of the New

Forest, he could pick up the distinctive churring of a night jar at extreme ranges. Likewise, the briefest stir of movement amongst the reeds at the edge of one of the ponds on Milton Common would alert him to the presence of a family of coots. How did he know all this stuff? And how could he *remember* it?

By now, I was beginning to get a fix on the kind of detective I wanted to spend my next three working years with. He needed to be someone reflective, someone solitary, someone a little abandoned by life. At work, he'd be harassed and pressurised as everyone else in the Job and as a direct result – like many coppers I'd got to know – he'd make sure he did something completely different in his spare time. Football wouldn't be my guy's game. Neither would rock-climbing or jet skiing or any of the countless contact sports favoured by younger detectives. Birding, on the face of it, felt like a bit of a steal but the more I thought about buying my man a pair of binos or a decent scope, the more it made sense.

Cops, after all, are the world's prime witnesses when it comes to all the symptoms that badge the disintegrating bits of our society. Whether it's family breakdown, or alcohol abuse, or Class "A" drugs, or poverty, or simple ignorance, crime is often the consequence. And where there's crime, you'll find coppers. My guy, like so many detectives I'd begun to meet, would be wearied by the sheer volume of human debris that washed up at his office door, by the broken lives and hopeless prospects, by the pissed young mothers and their absent partners, by the unthinking cruelties we so often inflict upon each other in the name of getting even. And so, as often as practically possible, he'd need to turn his back on all this mayhem and get away. And what better solace than to find himself a perch on the foreshore at Keyhaven, or at the Farlington RSPB site, or on a cliff top on the Isle of Wight, and spend a couple of hours peering into another of nature's hierarchies, untainted by stolen welfare cheques or a bellyful of Stella?

One afternoon, on yet another birding expedition, I put this notion to Roly. At last I had a name for my cop. He was to be called Faraday, partly after the discoverer of electricity (the bringer of light,

ho-ho), but mainly because the name sits so well on the tongue. I broke this news to Roly. Faraday, I said, was going to be a birder.

“Why?”

“Because that’s his way of staying sane.”

I tried to explain about dipping out of one world and into another. Birding, I said, would offer a gentler take on the difficult business of trying to conjure order from chaos, of trying to stay sane in the face of increasingly impossible odds.

Roly shot me a look, not a good sign.

“Have you ever seen a kittiwake pushing other bird’s young out of a cliff top nest?” he inquired. “Do you know what a peregrine falcon can do to a pigeon?”

I said I didn’t. And that, in any case, it didn’t matter. I really liked the contrast. Really, *really*, liked it.

He shook his head, reached for another bacon sandwich.

“Pure fantasy”, he said. “I thought you were better than this.”

I wasn’t. The next piece of Faraday came from another friend, a poet called George Marsh. I’d decided by now that I was going to give Faraday a deaf-mute son, a lad he’d been bringing up as a single parent for the last twenty years. A back-story like that struck me as both distinctive and potentially interesting. The problem was I knew nothing about deaf kids.

George occupied an interestingly cavernous house in Southsea, cooked like an angel, and penned great haiku. He also had a grown-up son called Jessie who’d been severely deaf since birth. George had been a single parent for most of Jessie’s life and – early on – had faced the challenge of establishing some kind of contact. He’d achieved this immense task in a variety of ways, including a robust insistence – against the prevailing wisdom – of the importance of sign and gesture. For George, the key to communication was getting through and if a raised glass successfully signalled *are you thirsty?*, then so be it.

George had also kept a kind of diary through the long years of Jessie’s youth, and he was generous enough to let me see it. Entry

by entry I tracked his battle to bring fatherhood into the near-silence of Jessie's world. This enterprise became a shared journey, and as the relationship between them deepened it I knew that Faraday would have been through something like this. Maybe birding might have provided the bridge into his young son's life. Maybe they started with books, with images, with wild life movies on TV, then stepped into the real thing, planning expeditions together, consulting maps, dreaming up picnics, building a shared fortress against the bafflements of the world outside. By now, Faraday had a Christian name: Joe. His boy, Joe Junior, became J-J.

Stepping away from detailed background research and trying to people this new landscape with characters of your own invention is the strangest process. To date, writing one-off thrillers, I'd welcomed the annual challenge to turn months of reading and dozens of conversations into fictional flesh and blood. The plot itself, that web of circumstance which would put my guys to the test, dictated various combinations of vice and virtue. Molly Jordan, the mother in *The Perfect Soldier*, determined to find out what really happened to her son in the Angolan minefields, must have a rock-like determination to nail the truth. While Todd Llewellyn, the ageing poster boy of a top-rating TV current affairs show, must be equally determined to sprinkle a little stardust on his flagging reputation. The tension between these two characters, with the addition of a carefully chosen supporting cast, had to power the novel from page to page but if I got these people wrong then the damage would be limited to a single book. Now, with a three-book contract on my desk, that escape lane was well and truly closed. I was going to be living with these people for at least three years. I had to get them right.

So Faraday became ever more important, the key to a door that might unlock Pompey and shed light on untold fictional goodies. What was the rest of his back-story? Where did he live? What did he eat? What kind of car did he drive? How come had to bring J-J up single-handed? And – most important of all – what was he like as a bloke?

A fellow scribe once told me that the working novelist can – literally –



play God. He was, of course, right but all that creative freedom comes with a big fat health warning. Your hero has to work on the page. He (or she) has to be credible. And they have to carry a sizeable readership to the very end of the book (or, in this case, series). So what was I going to do about Joe Faraday?

I went for lots of walks. I tried to picture this man, tried to put him in one of the countless offices I'd visited over the last couple of months, tried to imagine him in management meetings, in the interview suite, in bed. With J-J grown up and gone, how would he resume a private life he'd neglected for the past two decades? Where might that lead him? Who would he invite into this suddenly solitary life of his?

As the questions piled up, I became less and less certain of the answer. Then, one lunchtime, as I was leaving Kingston Crescent police station, I held the door open for a middle-aged man in a grey suit who was stepping in off the street. I think he was a detective but I can't be sure. I don't have a name and I've never seen him since but I knew at once that he was Faraday.

He was maybe a stone overweight. He was about my height, 5'11". He had greying hair and a full beard. He moved with that hint of caution that suggested a lower back problem. His grey suit badly needed a press. He looked a little bruised by life. But when he spared me a glance and a nod of thanks for holding the door open there was something in his eyes that spoke of gentleness and a sense of amused detachment. This was someone who'd been around a bit, someone who'd found a perch on the very edges of life, someone who knew how to watch, and listen, and draw the appropriate conclusions. In some respects, this guy was very CID. In others, he was anything but. But, from where I was standing, this was very definitely my man.

Next I had to find somewhere for him to live. The guarantee of a decent selection of birds took me to the city's eastern shore, where Pompey peters out into the tufty semi-drained marshland that fringes Langstone Harbour. A footpath skirts the mudflats the whole length of the island on which the city is built and at the southern end I found the perfect house.

It looked Victorian. It was a two-storey construction, red brick with

white clapboard. It had a usefully-sized garden and – from the big upstairs windows – an upper circle view of the gleaming silver-gray spaces of the harbour. At once, I could see Joe Faraday up there, seated behind his telescope, tallying the birdlife as it came and went. This would be his refuge, his sanity. This was where he and his son would have turned deafness into something briefly magical before the stropiness of adolescence began to put the boy beyond reach. This was where Faraday turned his back on the city and the Job, closed the door, and became a human being again.

In real life, the house is called Beach Lodge. A couple of hundred metres south are a pair of lock gates that once offered access to the canal that linked Langstone Harbour on one side of Portsea island to Portsmouth Harbour on the other. This masterpiece of Victorian strategic thinking, linking to more canals inland that would take shipping north to London, was designed to protect precious military cargoes from the marauding French out in the English Channel. Within a decade it had been overtaken by the coming of the railways but the lock gates and traces of the canal itself still survive. Sensing already that I'd be wanting to tell bits of Pompey's story, as well as Faraday's, I seized on this tiny fragment of history. Thus Beach Lodge became The Bargemaster's House.

But books like these – indeed, *any* books – have to be credible. The Bargemaster's House wouldn't be cheap. At the time I needed Faraday to move in – a year or so after J-J's birth – he'd still be in his early twenties. So how on earth would he afford a place like this? And, equally important, what had happened to J-J's mum?

This turned out to be the perfect example of one plot problem solving another. Already I knew that I wanted Faraday to have been a bit of a rebel and a bit of a romantic. In the sixth form at his Bournemouth comprehensive he scores good "A" levels in English, History and Economics. A place at university is his for the asking but instead he blows most of his savings on a cheapie air ticket to New York, works his way from illegal job to illegal job, and ends up in Seattle on the west coast. There, he celebrates his nineteenth birthday by meeting a woman called Janna in a downtown bookshop.

Janna, at 27, is feisty, big-boned, strong-minded, full of appetite, and already making her name as an art photographer.

A passionately reckless love affair results in almost instant pregnancy. Janna and Faraday return to UK, at first camping out with Joe's parents who have sold up in Bournemouth and moved to Freshwater on the Isle of Wight where Faraday's mum is now running a modest B&B. Faraday gets himself a seasonal driving job delivering fancy goods and other knick-knacks to seaside outlets. This income, plus a £350 parental loan, secures Janna and Faraday the rental deposit on a damp, draughty, mice-ridden rented bungalow in Freshwater Bay. They guard their new privacy with fierce delight.

Four months later, Joe junior is born. Within weeks, Janna is diagnosed with an advanced tumour in her left breast. This turns out to be her second tussle with cancer, a medical detail she'd never shared with her lover. By the year's end, she's dead.

Faraday, as a single parent, now needs a proper job, plus regular help with the infant J-J. His mum offers to do whatever she can but – independent to the last – Faraday is keen to find some other solution. He makes inquiries about a career in the police with the Hampshire Constabulary. He does well at the interviews. But his two-year induction as a probationer will have to take him back to mainland. At this point, fate intervenes in the shape of Janna's parents. They like what they've seen of their son-in-law and they adore J-J. They also have serious money and insist on Faraday accepting a sizeable cheque plus a regular allowance. This pays for both the Bargemaster's House and a daily nanny for J-J.

Serendipity? Well, yes. But the plot needs this kind of bend in Faraday's road and it sets him up nicely for the kind of guy he's got to become. How many other fictional cops have spent the last twenty years bringing up a child who turns out to be deaf? And how many of these guys have devoted the best parts of themselves to a shared passion for birds?

At this point in the development of the series, I was beginning to get excited by the prospects. In the shape of my hero-protagonist, I seemed to have come up with someone genuinely distinctive. Twenty

years on from J-J's birth, this is a man who knows how to cook a decent meal, who drives a clapped out Mondeo, who has a commendable indifference to material goods (apart from his precious Leica Red Dot binoculars), who grows a fine row of tomatoes, who knows a thing or two about Brent Geese, and who can do serious damage to a bottle of Cotes du Rhone.

My months of research, thanks to an ever-expanding circle of police contacts, had also given me a feel for the realities of police work. This, to no one's surprise, wasn't the world of serial killers and endless car chases. On the contrary, most of the guys I'd got to know spent a great deal of time chasing feral kids, stoned single mums, and a small army of walking wounded who simply couldn't cope with daily life. Back at the office, knackered and probably empty-handed, they could expect a four-hour stack of paperwork before clocking off.

This was emphatically crime in the minor key, hopelessly real, but once again the challenge lay in trying to turn a problem on its head. I was aware by now that I faced serious competition out in the commercial market place. Half of the UK, it seemed to me, were penning crime fiction. A lot of it was taken straight off the telly – serial killers, car chases – so if I was to fence off a bit of this precious turf I had to do something radically different. And what bolder move than to try and turn the minor key into major sales figures? To try and write crime fiction so real, so procedurally accurate, so in keeping with what the Job had become, that any working cop would read the stuff and shudder at its accuracy?

As a mission statement I was aware at once that this might not win me many friends amongst my fellow scribes, or even in Orion sales conferences. The marketing honchos in mainstream publishing love what Hollywood call "high concept". Bring on the barbecue killer and the paedo who feasts on babies' heads. Use any colour on the fictional palette as long as it's black. Make the stuff darker and darker until you've out-yukked everything else in the marketplace. There's an undeniable commercial logic behind all this. No author ever lost money by making people lock their doors at night.

So what would the likes of Malcolm Edwards make of a mission

statement like mine? An invitation to share the world of a bunch of deeply paranoid coppers trying to cope with an impossible job? To be frank, I'd no idea but I also knew that I had little choice. Luck had brought me Joe Faraday and the realities of his working world. All I had to do now was write a book.

## *Two*

It's August, 1999, and Lin and I have taken the ferry over to the Isle of Wight to catch the start of the Fastnet Race. My notes recall that it's the opening day of the football season and that the Fast Cat is full of Brummies on holiday.

At Cowes, the marina is bannered by Mumm Champagne and Skandia Life Insurance. Perfectly tanned young women are selling carry-out bespoke noodles at silly prices, and race crews are wandering through the crowds of gawkers, identically badged by their

sponsors. Demon Internet. Crew Clothing Company. Out on the pontoon, amongst the fleet of contending yachts, big-faced men with sun-bleached hair have mischief in their eyes. They gather in little knots aboard their respective boats, eyeing the talent, discussing the start. Their accents come from every corner of the globe. The Italians, as you might expect, are by far the sleekest.

The start itself happens hours later. A sizeable crowd has gathered on the foreshore as the yachts stitch back and forth behind the starting line, jockeying for position. A loud-voiced man behind us seems to know a lot about ocean racing and attaches a price to each of these monster yachts. If two of them collide, which seems more than possible, he thinks the damage will be in five figures. Easily.

Warning guns go off. Navigators check watches. Skippers trim sails. The dance, if anything, is even more frenzied: the boats turning, the water churning, the view from the beach a blur of sails, rich daubs of blue and crimson and sunshine yellow against the billowing cumulus over the mainland. Then comes a final gun and as if by magic the fleet shakes itself out, crosses the start line, and surges west towards the Needles. I like to think that this sudden conjuring of order out of chaos is some kind of metaphor for what awaits me at the PC once I start to write in earnest. Lin thinks that's sweet.

A week earlier, in the interests of research, I'd been aboard a smaller version of one of these yachts. It was a 28 footer called *Pipkin*. It lay in the RNSA marina in Gosport, across the water from Pompey, and it belonged to an retired RN Commander, Charles Wylie. I'd met Charles at one of the Southern Writers' Conferences at Winchester. Charles had penned a number of short stories and needed to find out whether they were any good. He'd attended a session of mine in the morning. At lunch, we found ourselves at the same table. He'd quite liked what I'd had to say about writing and wanted to propose a deal. Did I, by any chance, like sailing?

I told him I did. I'd been sailing dinghies for years.

"You're married?"

"I am."

"The wife?"

“Loves the water.”

“Excellent.”

The deal was simple. If I read his stories and delivered an honest opinion, he and his wife would take us to sea for the day. He passed me a thickish A4 envelope and we shook hands.

I read the stories that night. They weren't very good. I asked Lin what she'd do.

“Tell him,” she said. “The guy's probably been to war. He can certainly handle a phone call.”

Sound advice. I phoned Charles next day. When I told him he was wasting his time he first laughed, then thanked me for my candour. The tides looked promising next week. How were we placed next Tuesday?

Thus began another of the friendships that litter this story. Our voyage to Buckler's Hard – way down the Solent – was undiluted pleasure. The picnic Jean had prepared was delicious. We sank a couple of bottles of decent Sancerre and stormed back on a stiffening westerly breeze. Charles even let me helm most of the way. He'd spent his final years in the Navy checking out young Captains in boat-handling and navigation and was totally nerveless in the presence of someone as callow as yours truly. That in itself was a lesson worth learning. Grace under extreme pressure.

Charles gave up on the short stories (becoming a much-read poet in the process) but our relationship survived intact and when I badly needed technical advice for the first of the Faraday books he was the obvious go-to guy. The plot, lifted wholesale from the never-finished *Fastnet*, revolved around the disposal of a body carried aboard a yacht similar in size to Charles' *Pipkin*. The twist? The yacht was taking part in the Fastnet Race.

Charles, like many men with a naval background, believes in clarity. He thought the proposition that underpinned the plot was absurd and said so. My yacht, the fictitious *Marenka*, would be carrying a crew of five. A couple of these guys knew about the body. The rest didn't. A yacht that size is extremely intimate. Adult cadavers aren't small. They also smell. Was I seriously proposing to

convert this tiny below-deck space into some kind of hearse and hope that no one noticed? I said I was. And that somehow, between us, we had to make it happen.

On the phone, he had the grace to laugh.

"Tomorrow," he said. "I'll be on *Pipkin* for ten. Do join me."

I crossed to Gosport again on the ferry. Charles was waiting with a flask of tea and a blindfold. The tea was welcome. I was worried about the blindfold.

"I want to recreate a storm," he said. "So we'll start with this."

He wound the blindfold around my eyes. I could see nothing. We went below.

"It's night time," he said. "The batteries have shorted out, it's blowing a gale, and you've got to use the radio. OK? You're happy with that?"

I said I was. I still hadn't finished the tea. He guided me to the radio, explained how it worked, which buttons to press, then spun me round a couple of times and told me to send a message. I did my best and failed completely. Charles loosened the blindfold. Daylight flooded in.

"Not simple, eh?"

"No," I could only agree.

"But that's what you need. *Total* familiarity. You've got to touch perfect. You need to know every inch of this space. Listen. Watch me."

He blindfolded himself, told me to spin him round, then groped his way to the VHR radio and went through the motions of sending a message. I'd like to think he was cheating but he wasn't.

Once he was sighted again, I asked him what this had to do with my body, the corpse awaiting disposal at sea.

"Nothing," he said cheerfully "I just thought I'd get you in the mood."

Hiding the body, as it turned out, was less of a problem than he'd thought. Ahead of the main cabin lay the forepeak, complete with two bunks. Under race conditions this would be unoccupied. Charles, typically, had brought a tape measure. Detail, again. The need to



get the thing exactly *right*. Together we measured the deck hatch that opened directly into this space. Room enough to slide a corpse through? Secured in a body bag? Easy.

By now, Charles was warming to the plot. Had I thought about the weather? About the tides? About the kind of conditions that my unfolding story required? To be honest, I hadn't devoted much time to this but I knew it was important. This stuff mattered. If I got it wrong, readers in the know would smell a rat. Worse still, they'd probably bin the book and tell their mates it was rubbish. Bad news travels fast in my line of work. Not good.

I took the ferry home and listed the exact sequence of events that would take the racing fleet to the Fastnet Rock. I needed winds of a certain strength for the first day or so, a certain pattern of tides to justify a big dog-leg out to sea where the body would be dumped, after which I'd require the arrival of a full-scale storm as the story built to its climax. Charles took notes on the phone. He had a chum in Scotland, William Bowman, who specialised in designing weather systems tailor-made for plots like these. He'd ring again once he had something useful to pass on.

As good as his word, he was back within a couple of days. A series of barometric charts were en route to our address from Scotland. These would track the kind of deepening low depression I'd be needing. Charles, meanwhile, was preparing an hour-by-hour breakdown of exactly the course *Marenka* would require to take to make the book credible. He still thought the actual disposal of the corpse offered a challenge or two but he wished me well. I put the phone down. A remarkable man.

That year, the real Fastnet Race ended on August 12<sup>th</sup>. I have a black and white photo, scissored from a newspaper, that shows Catherine Chabaud crossing the line at Plymouth. There hadn't been a storm and no one, to my knowledge, had got rid of a body. The following morning, curious rather than nervous, I switched on the PC and settled down. Page one of *Turnstone* lay before me.

*The only time she'd ever been inside a police station was the day*

*someone had stolen her bike. Luckily it had turned up several weeks later, recovered from a second hand shop near her home, and afterwards she'd realised how worthwhile that trip to Kingston Crescent had been. The police were there to chase the bad people. They knew how to get things back. So who was to say it wouldn't happen again?*

By lunchtime I'd got to the end of the first section. I'd introduced D/I Joe Faraday and I'd sown the seeds of the coming plot. A middle class child reports her missing dad at the police station. Behind this shy faltering dialogue lie broken families and lives in chaos. This, the default Pompey setting, was more than satisfactory but I'd already made another discovery, a tad more troubling. Joe Faraday was an interesting enough bloke but I sensed already he'd never be able to carry entire books by himself. Why not? Because he was just too decent.

I went for a walk and had a think. These stories needed grit in the Pompey oyster and I knew instinctively that Faraday, unaided, simply couldn't supply it. There had to be someone else alongside him, someone at the coal-face, a D/C, someone who'd started his CID career in very different circumstances, someone prepared – indeed eager – to take a risk or two.

I jumped down to the beach and skipped a few pebbles across the flatness of the falling tide. By now I'd met dozens of D/Cs and their faces swam back to me. Pughie. J-R. Countless other names. Some of them were definite contenders. A combination of two or three of them, with a helping of authorial licence, might just do it. Then I stopped dead. Another idea. My rogue centre forward. Dave Hopkins.

As far as I could remember, Dave used to wear a suede car coat. He was over-weight. His hair was thinning. He favoured a particular brand of after-shave. He was always on his toes, ducking and weaving into conversations. He read other people like a book. Perfect.

I returned to the PC. Gazed at the screen. Reached for the keyboard.

*Heading into his late forties, Paul Winter was still an old-style D/C, wholly unreconstructed, a man for whom the difference between criminality and innocence was never less than subjective. As such, he was the perfect specimen of the old Portsmouth Mafia, a brotherhood of like-minded detectives who'd thrived on alcohol, patronage and favouritism in more or less equal measure. Unlike his ex-colleagues, though, Winter had survived the wholesale CID culture changes of the eighties and some of the newer intake still viewed him with awe. Winter, they said, had a rare talent for getting inside the heads of the bad guys, for winning their trust and opening their mouths, for tying them into schemes so complex, so Byzantine, they defied description. This interpretation of Winter's MO was both colorful and compelling but to Faraday the truth was altogether simpler. On a good day, just, Winter stayed legit. The rest of the time he was as bent as the low life he gloried in putting away.*

Thanks to Winter, the book powered forward. The guy was a dream to write. He came fully-formed, stepped onto the page in a cloud of after-shave, sowed artful chaos wherever the plot took him. He was cheeky, ruthless, and totally effective. I knew at once that readers would love him and I was right. Twelve books on, I still get e-mails from a fan in Northern Queensland. He heads a bunch of readers who have formed themselves into the Preserve Paul Winter Fellowship. *If that guy ever falls under a bus, he writes, we know where to find you.* Bless.

I finished the first draft of *Turnstone* a couple of weeks before the Millennium celebrations. On the whole I was pretty pleased with it. I was still clueless about mainstream crime fiction but as a book, a yarn, I thought it worked OK. What also seemed to work was Faraday's take on the city itself. As book followed book Pompey was to become a major character, a role that – to me at least – it richly deserved. Here's Faraday pausing for a moment while he searches a house in Paulsgrove, a post-war council estate to the north of the city.

*The bedroom window faced south. The sun was strong through the*

glass and from here, on the slopes of Portsdown Hill, Faraday could see the hazy sprawl of the city stretching away towards the gleam of the Solent and the low swell of the Isle of Wight. There were a 190,000 people down there, jig-sawed together in street after street of terraced housing. The parking was non-existent. The traffic was impossible. The schools were falling apart. The kids were out of control. And if you found yourself a job, the pay rates were often pitiful. Yet folk still hung on, glued to the island city by something deeper than habit.

More and more, Faraday found himself asking what it was about the place that made it so particular, so infuriatingly special, but none of the sensible answers did it proper justice. He'd lived here for over twenty years and he'd grown to love the seafront, with its busy views, and the quiet, shadowed cobblestones of Old Portsmouth, still haunted by the tramp of the press gang, but this was the tourists' Pompey, Flagship Portsmouth, the image that the council loved to peddle on posters nationwide. What it didn't capture or explain were the subtler glimpses of a very different city.

Even at the distance of two generations, poverty and war still seemed to shape the people he dealt with. They expected, and got, very little. A certain stoic resignation seemed to go with the turf. Yet still they managed a smile and a joke with people they trusted. Islanders were like that, Faraday thought. Given any kind of choice, they always looked inward.

These little moments of reflection, scattered throughout the book, were a delight to write, not least because they echoed something that I'd been trying to voice for some time. *Turnstone's* take on the police, too, felt authentic. These were guys who seemed to spend most of their time battling the system and their frustration showed, as did the forest of acronyms which made working conversations extremely hard to follow. This latter point featured in my editor's notes. *Thin out the technical stuff*, Simon wrote. *This is a novel not an essay*.

He was right, of course. In retrospect I was still far too close to all the research I'd done. It had crowded in on the book and occasionally

made the plot hard to follow. I needed to background all that stuff and become a story-teller again. A second draft rapidly followed. I hacked away at the acronyms until the reader could see a gleam or two of daylight. This improved the book no end but I still felt it was important to let Faraday occasionally reflect on the career that had decided the shape of his waking life.

*Faraday had been a D/I for four years now, winning the promotion after a ten year stint as a D/S in various outlying CID offices. The move back to Portsea Island had brought him much closer to home and he'd treasured the freedom of being his own boss in a division as busy and varied as Portsmouth North, but he'd never anticipated the distance he'd have to keep between himself and the rest of the squad.*

*In part, he'd learned to recognize this gulf as inevitable. It was true what his old guvnors had told him - that the investigative buck well and truly stopped with the D/I - but there was something else, too, and the older he got the more difficult it was to define. It had to do with laughter and a degree of irresponsibility. It had to do with the knowledge that each working day was finite and that a limit existed to what one man could reasonably achieve. Get yourself promoted to Detective Inspector, and those comforts disappeared.*

*Faraday's responsibility was no longer one part of the jigsaw, or even two, but the whole bloody puzzle. It was his job to piece it together, his job to conjure administrative order out of chaos, and the longer he did it, the harder it was to resist the conclusion that the job was impossible. Being a successful D/I meant learning how to survive under a state of constant siege - not just from the criminal fraternity but from his own bosses as well. And in war, as Faraday was beginning to understand, no plan survives contact with the enemy.*

Turnstone published towards the end of 2000. In a crowded marketplace, it attracted little attention but a couple of the reviews were nice. Guys who knew the genre far better than I seemed to detect something new in the writing. The Pompey setting undoubtedly helped, as did the whiff of genuine sharp-end coppering. Here,

maybe, was someone who'd taken the trouble to find out what these guys were really like. "The best British procedural that I've read since John Harvey's *Resnick* series," wrote Mark Timlin in *The Independent of Sunday*. "And that's a real compliment." John Harvey? I made a note and headed for Waterstones.

After every publication day comes a down-moment when you wonder whether anyone out there really cares but in this case it didn't happen. On the contrary I began to get a thin trickle of response from the blokes in the Job I'd been pestering for all those months and by and large they seemed to like what I'd done. This was a huge relief but more to the point it seemed to make all the difference when it came to adding more names to my contacts book.

At first I didn't quite understand why they'd suddenly relaxed and lowered their guard but then it dawned on me that they'd sensibly been waiting to see what I'd make of them. I knew by now that most working detectives have nothing but contempt for the kind of crime drama they see on telly. Most of this stuff bears absolutely no resemblance to the job they do and they don't understand why the makers of this drivel don't bother to get it right. Here, on the other hand, was a recognisably accurate account of life at the sharp end, warts and all. *Turnstone* didn't make them out to be supermen, far from it, but most of the stuff that gets in their face was there, and for that they were, in a strange way, both surprised and sort-of impressed.

These guys, of course, were working at street level, run ragged by the drum-beat of volume crime, and as the weeks went by I began to wonder what the senior officers at force headquarters might make of the book. Naturally I'd done my best to reflect the smallest print of CID culture, much of which concerns itself with slagging off the bosses. They're remote. They haven't got a clue what really happens at the coal face. They think you can sort out a city like Pompey with sheaf after sheaf of carefully prepared statistics. Not true.

I was, by now, actively planning Book Two. Thanks to Mark Timlin, I was beginning to believe that my take on crime fiction might not be quite as doomed as I'd once suspected. I'd also become

fascinated by the company of Paul Winter. I'd never devoted the kind of careful biographical attention I'd lavished on Joe Faraday but now I was beginning to wonder where he'd come from, what his private life was like, why he and his wife had never had kids, a tiny chorus of questions in my head that made his character ever more real.

Guys I'd met in the Job felt the same. Some of them had limited patience for Faraday. One, a hugely experienced (and very funny) D/S on the Major Crime Team, thought he'd last ten minutes, tops, on a real job. Faraday, he said, thought too hard about the wrong things. He was too thin-skinned, too vulnerable. All the stuff about J-J and the Bargemaster's House was, to be frank, a bit of a wank. The guy was away with the fucking birds. End of.

Winter, on the other hand, plainly came from an honourable line of thoroughly devious blokes fluent in the darker arts of crime detection. These were the guys who knew how to draw the straightest line between all the investigative dots. Number one, they delivered. Number two, you wouldn't trust a word they said. And number three, they made you laugh.

I couldn't have agreed more. I liked Faraday a lot. More and more he offered the perfect prism for a view of Pompey – informed, stoical, slightly melancholic – which I happened to share, and the catastrophic misjudgements he was prone to make in his private life offered rich prospects for the books to come. Winter, on the other hand, sauntered guilefully from page to page, totally on top of things, completely in command, with barely a backward glance. Here was someone who wrote himself. To date, I'd simply enjoyed his company.

By this time, Lin and I had been living in Pompey for more than fifteen years. Towards the end of the Nineties, I'd been offered a regular column by the city's daily paper and gathering material for my weekly 700 words had deepened my appreciation for this extraordinary city. It seemed to me the place was changing by the month. The naval dockyard was winding down. Commercial developers were beginning to eye some of the prime harbour side sites for which the

Ministry of Defence no longer had a use. HMS Vernon, once the Navy's diving and minesweeping establishment, was now a forest of cranes. In less than a year, this building site would become Gunwharf, a bold mix of retail, leisure and residential opportunities, the boast of the tourist board and a magnet for visitors. A city traditionally uncursed by money was at last on the move.

Should my books reflect a little of this transition? I thought they should. Was everyone happy with the way things were going? With the glossy lifestyle promises on the placards surrounding the Gunwharf site? With the coming of London brands and London prices? Emphatically not. Here's Faraday again, pausing for another moment of reflection.

*Faraday turned away, swamped by a sudden anger, staring out at the lights mirrored on the blackness of the harbour. The city, with all its rough imperfections, lapped at the walls of this new development. So far, Gunwharf's security headaches had been limited to the theft of materials from the building site but there'd soon come a point when they'd have to sort out just who exactly this gleaming lifestyle vision was for. Would closed-circuit TV and smart door locks really keep the inner city where it belonged? Or were they prepared to face the social consequences of building paradise next door to one of the most deprived areas in the country?*

This kind of friction was deeply promising. As was the possibility of giving Winter more of a starring role. I wanted him off the leash. I wanted him put to the test. I wanted him to seize the narrative by the throat and give it a good shake. And so I came up with *The Take*.

In the book's opening pages, Faraday's treasured Management Assistant, Vanessa Parry, is killed in a head-on collision. The guy responsible is a rep selling crisps to Pompey corner stores. This isn't the stuff of prime-time drama but such a pointless, avoidable death sparks a deep anger in Faraday, which colours everything he does thereafter.

Winter, meanwhile, has bad news of his own to cope with. For



one thing, he discovers he's not even in contention for a prized D/C vacancy on the city's pro-active drugs squad. And for another, he's just been told that his wife, Joannie, has inoperable cancer.

*The Take* turned out to be a book about rage. Faraday's (over the dead Vanessa). And Winter's (over his dying wife). Granted compassionate leave to nurse Joannie, Winter finds himself unable to cope with his bewilderment and his grief and sets out to freelance an enquiry into a rogue gynaecologist who has gone missing under suspicious circumstances after maiming a number of ex-patients. This same Misper case is also the subject of an official investigation led – inevitably – by Joe Faraday.

As anticipated, Winter steals the book. Always a lap or two ahead of Faraday, he finally nails the denouement in a revenge scene that came out of nowhere and was an absolute joy to write. As well as a maverick surgeon and a dickhead crisp salesman, *The Take* features a rich cast of supporting characters including a maddened publican with a grudge against the Gunwharf developers, a beautiful chanteuse performing cabaret at a top Jersey hotel, a university lecturer with a supplementary career in Albanian skin flicks, and a perv in a Donald Duck mask who is terrifying after-dark walkers on Milton Common. Later challenged to justify this collection of grotesques, I settled on the Charles Dickens defence. The great man, of course, was born in Pompey. In a city that shelters every possible variety of the human condition, I pointed out that – like Dickens - I'd be failing in my duty as a novelist if I didn't put one or two of these people on the page.

Writing *The Take* (originally called *Blackwit*) served me well. Research took me to the yawning hole that was the Gunwharf site, where a construction engineer explained exactly where to bury a body if I wanted to cause maximum disruption a couple of years down the line, while an Accident Investigator from Hantspol taught me how to reconstruct every aspect of a fatal head-on from the damage to both vehicles and the marks left on the road.

More and more, I was coming to realise that countless plot possibilities lurked in the margins of conversations like these, and more and more I sensed a real fascination with the writing process on

the part of my interviewees. A motor cycle cop who operated out of Kingston Crescent wanted to know exactly how the fifteen pages of notes I'd taken from our conversation would feature in the finished book. When I told him I'd probably stitch in a couple of the killer phrases he'd used, as well as reflecting a little of the procedure he was obliged to follow for an incident like this, he was amazed.

"Just that?" He said. "After all the work you've done?"

I told him that wasn't the point. I was grateful for his time and the effort he'd made to get me up to speed but I pointed out that he had to see it from where I was sitting. What I did for a living was an act of trespass. I was intruding in stuff about which I knew nothing. Finding out as much as I could was the least I owed people like him.

He nodded, then reached for his helmet.

"You want to be careful," he said. "You're starting to sound like a bloody detective."

*The Take* did well. The reviewers, once again, were kind and the people who organise crime festivals up and down the country began to inquire if I was interested in making the odd appearance. I said I was, and the first invitation appeared within weeks, but the more I thought about *The Take* the more I realised its real importance lay in the structure of the book. For the second time, I'd run two major figures through the same story and once again it seemed to have worked.

In some respects, Faraday and Winter couldn't have been a greater contrast. Faraday was hardworking, scrupulously honest, and prone to worrying too much about the darkness that enveloped so many of the jobs that came across his desk. Winter, on the other hand, thrived on the human wreckage that littered so many corners of the city he policed. Every new contact, every stranger's voice on the mobile he reserved for Job calls, every 8.00am conversation in the cells at the Custody Centre, represented a fresh opportunity for seeding a little mischief way beyond the permitted investigative limits.

In terms of MO, and perhaps raw nerve, these were two very different individuals. Yet I was coming to realise that both of them, in their separate ways, were loners, solitaires, banged up on the tiny

squares of turf they'd made their own. Neither of them paid many visits to the canteen. Nor were they much interested in friendships outside the Job. Instead they drew a bead on the next enquiry, and the enquiry after that, and did their level best to get a result. In books to come, in ways that I couldn't possibly have anticipated, this dawning truth was to have profound consequences but for the time being I was simply relieved that – on the page, at least – they seemed to do the business. They weren't mates, far from it, and I doubted they ever would be. But between them they kept the pages turning, and for that I was deeply grateful.

### *Three*

In April of the year *Turnstone* was published, Steve Watts put my budding relationship with the Major Crime operation on a more formal basis. He talked to his bosses at headquarters in Winchester and drew up a letter on headed notepaper. This letter was the key to a very important door and I still have it. It gave me access to the Major Incident Complex at Kingston Crescent Police Station. More importantly, “subject to operational commitments”, it confirmed that I may “observe the management of a major investigation, subject at all times to the discretion of the Senior Investigating Officer”. The SIO would be Steve Watts. A major investigation would be a murder. All I had to do now was wait for a body to turn up.

In talks to libraries, reader groups, and sundry other gatherings I often make the point that Pompey is God's gift to the working novelist. It's a city bursting with stories and it's never once let me down. On this occasion it was early afternoon in the dead time between Christmas and the New Year. There was snow on the ground. A man was walking his dog in woodland north of the city. The dog was rooting around in undergrowth when it began to bark. Its owner caught up.

Buried in a shallow grave was the body of a young man. Thus began Operation *Becton*.

Steve Watts was as good as his word. The investigation kicked off on 2<sup>nd</sup> January 2001 and I was invited along to watch. The whole of the third floor in the block behind Kingston Crescent police station belonged to the Major Crime Team. On the first working day of the New Year it was humming. D/Cs and Management Assistants hurried up and down the long central corridor, toting armfuls of files. In the tiny kitchen at the end, waiting for the kettle to boil, more D/Cs were comparing New Year parties. Someone had laid hands on a packet of Jammy Dodgers. Rain drummed at the window. Most of these guys, I realised, had been praying for a decent murder over Christmas. The overtime, said one, would help settle all those bills.

I caught up with Steve Watts. The crime scene out in the woods had been sealed off within an hour of the dog discovering the body. A tent had been erected over the grave and the Highways Authority had taken steps to control traffic on the nearby road. Inner and outer cordons had been established and a subsequent POLSA search, radiating slowly outwards from the shallow grave, had found a bungee, a pair of cable ties, a shoe, and an upturned flower pot. The Crime Scene Manager meanwhile, the detective who would be driving the forensic operation, had called for a Home Office pathologist.

The post-mortem took place within 24 hours. The victim had a broken rib and stab wounds. The cause of death was a compression ligature around his neck, in all likelihood a bungee tightened by the insertion of a twig. DNA tests and a distinctive tattoo provided ID. Our victim turned out to be a low-level drug runner with an address in the city and a criminal record for offences including burglary, shoplifting, drug dealing and low-level assault. He'd been released from prison only seven months earlier. The last time anyone had seen him alive was 11<sup>th</sup> November, 2000, which happened to be Armistice Day.

Operation *Becton* gathered speed. Early on, this killing had been identified as a "medium runner", an inquiry with legs, a chain of events complex and challenging enough to warrant a decent helping of the "R" word. The "R" word is code for resources and I was quickly

learning that the major crime machine eats money. Already there were twenty three officers assigned to *Becton*, and Steve Watts had put in an initial bid for 400 hours of paid overtime, with a contingent reserve bid for 100 more. It wasn't to be enough.

Every major investigation inches forward meeting by meeting. I sat in on one of the first of them. This was a coming-together of the guys who were to manage the forensic strategy. They included the Crime Scene Coordinator and a liaison forensic scientist, both of whom were reporting back from the crime scene. According to the pathologist, the body had been out in the woods between two weeks and six months. This comfortably fitted the last known sighting of the victim a month and a half earlier. Another cable tie had been found on the body, securing the wrists, and the lad had been bare-chested under his jacket. The bungee, as far as the team could determine, had been applied at the scene and the stab wounds administered afterwards. There were no tyre marks in the vicinity.

By now the Major Incident Room was at full throttle. The God of the MIR is the HOLMES 2 software package. This, in essence, is a huge electronic filing system indexing every last particle of information retrieved by the investigation team. When it detects what one of the civvie indexers called "cross-related inputs", it flags them up. This tool, bred from the near-abortive hunt for the Yorkshire Ripper in the late Seventies, has become indispensable in major investigations but carries its own health warning. The same civvie indexer, a woman of immense experience, put it rather well. "It ends up by driving the inquiry," she said. "You become a slave to the system. It's self-perpetuating. It breeds like a rabbit."

What it breeds are "actions", specific tasks allocated to individual D/Cs. These guys were already fanning out across the city, tracking down associates of the deceased, knocking on front doors in the area where he'd lived, trying to Hoover up any glimpse, any half-remembered scrap of gossip or conversation, any tiny shred of information that might feed the HOLMES monster back in the Major Incident Room.

At eleven o'clock on this first morning, Steve called a core

management meeting, attended by all the major players in the enquiry team. It was at this point that I realised the importance of his conference table. Eight chairs weren't enough. Neighbouring offices were raided for more.

By now, Steve – in his own words – had spent nearly half a day putting the squeeze on the organisation for added resource. He'd recognised from the start that *Becton* would be picking its way through the Pompey underworld, a *demi-monde* of petty criminals, drug debts, sexual favours, and lifestyles badged by massive helpings of chaos. These “associates of the deceased”, as he dryly put it, could be violent and he wanted his officers to be aware of the implications. It would be the job of his detectives to TIE some of the city's more volatile brethren and he wanted appropriate back-up wherever possible. TIE, I learned, meant “Trace, Implicate, or Eliminate”.

The meeting went on. Already, Steve was anticipating what lay down the investigative road. He wanted Arrest Strategies drawn up. He wanted Tactical Interview Advisers (TIAs) appointed. He wanted to scare up possible leads through a selective release of information to media outlets. He was thinking posters. And, most important of all, he was emphasising how close *Becton* needed to get to the victim himself: what kind of man was this? Who had he shared his life with? Who were his friends? Who were his enemies? What kind of circumstances, in short, might explain his death?

Putting together this kind of jigsaw was the job of the Intelligence Cell. It was led by a D/S called Andy Harrington, an ex-matelot with decades of CID experience. He was a big man, like Steve Watts, and I never met another serving detective who didn't have a good word for him. He carried himself with an air of cheerful authority and had won himself a force-wide reputation for nailing the bad guys. Andy, said people who should know, was the best.

For some years now, Andy had been monitoring the Pompey drug scene, trying to get a fix on exactly how it worked. This kind of intelligence, I was fast realising, was absolutely key in all kinds of law and order contexts because the bulk of crime – acquisitive or otherwise – is drug related. So just how did *Becton* fit into this jigsaw?

In Pompey, according to Andy, an organised crime network controlled the supply of cocaine, MDMA, ecstasy, amphetamine and cannabis. Of the city's major players, a couple were rated as Tier Three, a mark of honour in the Pompey underworld. These were the quality criminals who'd set up sophisticated laundering operations, washing their dirty drugs money through property, café bars, tanning salons, estate agencies, taxi firms, and any other legitimate enterprises they could add to their growing business empires.

Below this layer of top faces lay the wholesalers, criminals who bought from the Tier Three guys and made a tidy living from dealing out narcotics to street level drug pushers. According to Andy, they also dealt in stolen goods, nicked benefit cheques, and pretty much anything else from the black economy that would find a buyer. The wholesalers were protected by enforcers who also acted as debt-collectors.

Which brought us back to *Becton*. In Andy's view, our victim – in all probability – lay at the very bottom of the pile of low-life that serviced the city's appetite for drugs. These were the worker ants who flogged tabs, or weed, or a gram or two of the laughing powder to the end users. Their lives were frequently a mess. They got by on alcohol and cheap drugs and were generally clueless when it came to money. They moved from address to address and got slapped from time to time by some of the bigger guys. Andy called them "work rats".

Was this, then, a slapping that had got out of hand? Was our young victim paying a higher price than normal for not keeping his accounts in order? Andy smiled but wouldn't commit himself.

"Anything's possible," he said.

At half past eleven that same morning a handful of forensic officers gathered in Steve's office for an update. The investigation was moving very fast now and decisions had to be taken. One of them concerned a newish forensic technique called Low Copy Number, or LCN. This enabled analysts to build a court-proof DNA profile from a handful of human cells. The cable tie around the victim's wrists had clearly been handled by what Steve called "persons of interest". Ditto the bungee

ligature that had ended his life. Both were prime candidates for LCN analysis and Steve ordered the full Monty accordingly. He also wanted soil samples to be taken from the area around the body with a view to inviting a forensic soil expert to join the *Becton* team. Should matching soil later be found on a suspect's footwear or clothing, or in his car, this might prove conclusive.

By now a third crime scene had been declared at the victim's flat (the first two crime scenes were the grave, and the body itself). The scenes of crime team had identified 85 visible marks (fingerprints or palm prints) and Steve wanted all of them launched against the national data base. The victim had clearly kept rough company and many of these marks might well raise a name and contact details, thus expanding the Association Chart already taking shape in the Intel Cell. To Steve's slight disappointment, the SOC team had found no traces of blood at the victim's flat, suggesting that the killing had taken place elsewhere, but he wanted the premises chemically treated to determine whether or not the scene had been cleaned-up. By now the first tranche of submissions was ready for despatch to the laboratory of the Forensic Science Service at Chepstow. A second would follow within 24 hours. Each of these little parcels, needless to say, would have significant cost implications.

Lunchtime came and went. We snacked on sandwiches and Jammy Dodgers. Down the corridor, the HOLMES monster coughed out a series of High Priority (HP) actions. D/Cs came and went, reporting to the Receiver then picking up another job from the Action Allocator, while Andy Harrington and his team in the Intel Cell fed more names into the Association Chart and mused over the all-important Time Line. By now, attention was settling on two items, both of which were missing. One was the victim's white van, in which he may have met his death. The other was his mobile phone, a potential treasure trove of information.

A meeting of the full *Becton* squad was called for five o'clock. I counted 37 bodies in the Major Incident Room. Civvie indexers were still at their terminals, inputting the latest data. The floor was a tangle of computer cables and outside, in the darkness, it was still raining.



Steve chaired the briefing, calling for contributions as the story unfolded. He concentrated, in the first place, on the victim's van. The city had been checked, street by street. Details had been passed to Traffic and circulated force-wide. Tomorrow the search would be extended to the Portsmouth/Fareham corridor in the west, and Cosham and Paulsgrove in the east. If necessary, the Hantspol spotter aircraft, call sign Boxer One, would also be available, extending the search parameters ever wider.

In the meantime, *Becton* officers were checking likely garages, lock-ups, scrap yards, and the council's store of abandoned and burned-out vehicles. The city's CCTV tapes, alas, were wiped after 28 days – leaving *Becton* without pictures – but a trawl through Traffic's stop/check records had come up with something deeply interesting. On the 11<sup>th</sup> November, the last day the victim had been seen alive, a random stop/check at the top of the city, near Hilsea Lido, had snared the very same guy. An air gun had been found in the back of his van. This didn't warrant an arrest, or even a caution, but the location might be significant. Hilsea Lido was close to Hilsea Lines, a relic of the city's nineteenth century fortifications. Not many people went there after dark. It was, in the words of one D/S, "a top bogging spot".

By now, a search of the victim's flat had found two mobile phones. After application to the phone company, these would produce billing records, including a list of the last calls he'd made. By use of a technique called cell site analysis, it might also enable *Becton* to track the victim's movements had the phone been active during the final hours of his life.

All this, to the tyro crime novelist, was top stuff but even more astonishing was the volume of details that – already – were beginning to emerge about the victim's lifestyle. The guy was twenty three years old. He appeared to have had a number of relationships in his young life, significant or otherwise. None of them lasted longer than a month but these women seemed to want to mother him. Only six months ago, he'd been badly beaten up over a drug debt by two men who were rapidly becoming prime suspects. On another occasion he'd

threatened to screw a house belonging to an associate's mother. From all these accounts, gathered in the last eight hours, there emerged a picture of a lawless, chaotic world of petty transactions, crimes gone wrong, multiple grudges, and spasms of retributive violence. The victim, probably of his own volition, had led a truly shit life. In the fug of the Major Incident Room, it was hard not to feel the first prickles of sympathy.

After the squad meet broke up, I met Steve in the corridor. How was it going? He paused and checked his watch. He was already looking at 750 hours of overtime. Another call to headquarters.

By Day Two, *Becton* was beginning to settle down. Investigators always talk about "the golden hours" in any major enquiry – that first day when you give every available tree a big shake and see what falls out - but it was obvious already that *Becton* was going to take more than this. Gathering worthwhile evidence can be a painstaking job and it was now Steve's task to piece together exactly what had happened, charge the bad guys, and make it stick in court. He'd secured his extra overtime and anticipated running the enquiry at full strength for maybe a month. In his view, the people *Becton* was up against were both violent and cunning. There'd be no easy wins but in the end he had total confidence that he'd get a result.

A couple of hours later, I found myself with a D/S called Dave Sackman. Dave was an incomer from the Met but had been with the Hampshire force - Hantspol - for a long time. He was mad about football and spent a lot of his spare time coaching a youth team up in the sprawl of Leigh Park. Like Dave Hopkins, he had the gift of conjuring a conversation, and a relationship, from virtually nothing. He was also one of the funniest guys I've ever met.

I asked him how it was going. He said it was going fine. The time scales on TV drama, he told me, are all to cock. This kind of stuff always takes a lot longer than you'd ever imagine. We move very methodically, meeting by meeting, and we chose our time to strike. Will we bottom it out in the end? Of course we will. Why? Because our gang is a lot bigger, and a lot more clever, than theirs.

This was fighting talk. What about resources?

Dave pulled a face. In his view, the guys up at HQ just hadn't got a clue how stretched the Major Crime set-up had become. 71 unallocated actions? Just ten blokes on the ground? Impossible.

The full squad gathered again at five o'clock for an update. The all-important van remained untraced but the Intel Cell were starting to put together a picture of the victim's last days. In prison, it seemed, he'd been a worried man. After release, the pressure seemed to have got worse. He was delivering drugs for one of the prime suspect's associates and being paid in those same drugs. The prime suspect, increasingly pissed off with him, was one of the men who'd allegedly administered the beating. The victim's young life was falling apart. On the day he disappeared, he'd taken a series of calls from the prime suspect. After that, silence.

Steve had, by now, decided to scoop up both prime suspects. Arrest strategies were discussed and assistance requested from the Fratton pro-active team. The arrest would take place at six am at two addresses in North End. Arrangements were made for full forensic searches at both premises. Suspects' cars would be seized and likewise combed for evidence linked to the victim. The men would be taken to separate police stations and interviewing teams would be briefed by the TIA. In the meantime, another suspect would be placed under surveillance to gauge his reaction to the arrests

This, on the face of it, struck me as a bold move. D/I Martin Shucker was the Deputy SIO under Steve Watts. He grinned. "There's always a gain," he said, "whatever happens. Either they'll blame each other or implicate someone else."

I went to bed that night trying to imagine what it must be like to be Steve Watts. I'd been seriously impressed by the reach of the Major Crimes machine, and by the painstaking level of detail which accompanied every small step forward. But it seemed to me that *Becton* was a million miles away from closing the case. Steve might well have the right names in *Becton's* frame but trying to establish a

reliable account that might spark any kind of breakthrough, on the basis of the evidence so far gathered, felt like a very big ask. I'd said something of the sort to Steve that evening before our ways had parted. The fact that I was expressing an opinion amused him. He made no comment.

The arrests were effected before dawn the following day, both on suspicion of murder. The suspects were booked into separate custody suites and conferenced with their lawyers. It was gone midday before the first interviews began.

At 13.19, Scenes of Crime investigators found a significant quantity of blood under one of the suspect's kitchen tables. Swabs were taken and despatched to London for priority DNA analysis. At more or less the same time, evidence from elsewhere established that the engine on the victim's van had recently been swapped for another. Detectives making burned vehicle checks had therefore been looking for the wrong engine number. Steve, desperate for reinforcements, ordered the checks to be re-done.

By now, thanks to the demands of the two interviews, *Becton* was reduced to just six D/Cs at the sharp end. Steve worked the phones, the robber baron of the Major Crime Team trying to snatch bodies from CID offices across Hantspol. At 14.02, ten D/Cs from the Force Crime Unit arrived. They were Steve's for two days. Go for it.

At 16.01, word arrived that one of the two suspects was gobbing off. Nothing incriminatory, alas, but a warning that "very dangerous people are involved". The other suspect, on legal advice, was saying very little. In these situations the police are obliged to make pre-interview disclosure to the suspect's lawyer and in this case the brief had decided that the evidence gathered to date was thin. No point, therefore, in offering hostages to fortune. The other suspect's wife was also refusing to answer questions.

It was at this point, with Steve Watts boxed in by the PACE clock which dictates when a prisoner must be released, that I had a conversation with one of *Becton*'s more experienced D/Cs. Her words have stayed with me ever since. This is what she said.

“It’s the system. The law. PACE (The Police and Criminal Evidence Act). All this stuff is designed by people who haven’t got a clue about the practical consequences. We have to obey the system. We have to work within it. And you know what? The system constantly lets us down. There’s always someone looking over your shoulder. There’s no trust, no leeway, no scope, no freedom. You meet young kids, four years into the Job. They’re good, they’re talented, they’re bright, they want to make it work, but you know what? They leave. They go. They’re off. Why? Because this job’s become fucking impossible. You move at snail’s pace. There’s no alternative. Because of the system.”

Steve’s detachment that afternoon was impressive. He’d put most of *Becton’s* chips on the square marked Early Arrest and he was very happy to let his interview teams, under their Tactical Interview Advisers, get on with it. Every time I popped my head round his office door he was bent over the keyboard. More forms to fill in. More e-mails to send. By now, I’d given up asking about the overtime.

In the late afternoon, one of the SOC teams searching the suspects homes came up with three items: a cable tie, a pair of bungee clips, and a video with the victim’s name of it. None of these items offered definitive proof of anything but the weight of circumstantial evidence was beginning to move in *Becton’s* favour. From the other premises, meanwhile, a search team were reporting more blood stains in the kitchen where a set of knives appeared to be one short. In addition, the team had found yet another bungee that exactly matched the one recovered from the victim’s body. This, plus a scissored cutting from last week’s *News*, describing the find in the woods.

It was at this point that Andy Harrington, a veteran of situations like these, took me aside. “It’ll be the laws of chemistry that fuck ‘em,” he said. “Not the laws of the land.” This little assurance seemed, at first sight, to sit oddly against the despair voiced by the D/C I’d talked to earlier but the more I thought about it, the more sense it made. Both detectives recognised that the legal system made life hard for the Men in Blue. But Andy recognised, as well, that pharmacology was on the

side of the angels. The guys making serious money from narcotics were often partial to a toot or two themselves, leading to seriously daft judgement calls. One major importer from the Pompey area, very definitely under the influence, had been arrested for nicking a bottle of milk from a milk float.

By now, rather fittingly, Andy's Intel Cell was beginning to put the web of mobile phone calls together. This was simply evidence that the calls had happened, with no clue to their contents, but on what was probably the last day of the victim's life, he took four calls from the prime suspect. The last one was at 17.21. After that, the prime suspect never phoned him again. This, in Andy's phrase, was a prime indicator.

Of what? I'd spent the last hour of so wondering about this quickening trickle of circumstantial evidence: the bungee cords, the cable ties, the missing knife, the cutting from the *News*, and now the sudden break in communication between the prime suspect and the man he might have killed. How soon before co-incidence ceases to be co-incidence? What kind of weight might a jury place on evidence like this?

The evening wore on. From neither custody suite were there signs of any kind of breakthrough. The two men had been arrested at 06.00. Very soon, Steve would have to decide whether or not to go for a twelve hour extension. By the time I left to go home, he'd yet to make the call.

The following morning, I reappeared at the Major Crimes Suite. Steve had decided to apply for the 12 hour custody extension and a uniformed Superintendent had signed it off. To maximise the extra time he'd applied for reinforcements and *Becton* now had fifty D/Cs out on the street. The original overtime ceiling of 750 hours had now doubled and in Steve's estimation it could still go a whole lot further.

I sensed that this was, in its way, a declaration of war. Every force in the UK (there are 42 in all) has different priorities. Some believe that the public are more pissed-off by the irritations of volume crime, than by the far more remote possibility of being murdered.

They therefore devote the bulk of their resources to the battle against anti-social behaviour and petty theft, and keep the major crime apparatus on starvation rations. Not Hantspol.

To Steve's immense satisfaction, Operation *Becton* was getting the fullest backing. The bosses, like Steve himself, believed that it was time to draw a line in the sand, to send a message. The deeper the *Becton* squad penetrated the tangle of relationships, feuds, burglaries, assaults, drugs offences, and other criminal mayhem that surrounded the body in the woods, the more obvious it became that these guys needed reminding just who was in charge. Beyond *Becton* lay anarchy. And Steve was having none of that.

At the custody suites, the interview teams were holding off pending the results of forensic searches. Scenes of Crime had nearly finished with the lead suspect's property and were now concentrating on his car and a trailer recovered a couple of streets away. By now, there appeared to be evidence linking this guy with housebreaks beyond the Portsmouth area and both the car and the trailer had been removed for full forensic treatment. Might the car have been used to take the victim out to the woods? SOC were taking seat tapings, floor sweepings and print lifts from every available surface. Sheets of paper in the glove box carried indentations that might, or might not, prove significant. From the trailer, meanwhile, came builder's aggregate, scraps of carpet, rolls of bin liner, sundry clothing, plus a diary belonging to the suspect. Each of these items raised a separate action, widening *Becton's* reach.

The flat belonging to the other suspect was also getting the treatment. So far, Scenes of Crime had recovered 30 print lifts, a good deal of stolen property, a cache of bondage gear, and a stack of porn videos. While this offered good background colour, there was still nothing to tie either suspect to the death of *Becton's* young drug runner.

Back at the Major Crimes Suite, meanwhile, a handful of fit-looking men with scary haircuts had turned up. They were toting silver boxes of the kind we used to cart round with film crews and they locked themselves in one of the offices before blacking out the ribbed

glass panels with rolls of dustbin liner. When I asked Steve what was going on, he refused to comment. Months later, at Winchester Crown Court, the trial judge made reference to covert tape-recordings of conversations at the defendants' homes, conversations which revealed a callousness on their part towards what had happened to the victim. Were these guys from the sneaky beaky covert ops unit? Almost definitely. Had they planted a device at the suspect's house? No comment.

At this point, late morning, there was still no news from the custody centres. Then, around midday, came a breakthrough. A couple of *Becton's* detectives, still hunting for the victim's Escort van, discovered an incident back in November, the day after he disappeared. At 00.46 the fire brigade had been called out to a vehicle blaze on an industrial estate in Fareham. When detectives visited the site, the scorch marks were still visible on the concrete in front of Unit 36. The van, according to fire brigade records, had been totally burned out and what little was left of the engine block had been sent to a local scrap yard. Fare-ham lies at the bottom of the A32, just along the coast from Pompey. The body had been found seven miles north, a two-minute drive off this very same road.

The find generated a blizzard of actions. Steve ordered a POLSA search of the area around the seat of the fire. A nearby skip was declared a Scene of Crime. When detectives discovered that it had been emptied three times since the fire, Steve wanted the contents traced. House-to-house calls blanketed nearby premises. More detectives descended on garages on the presumed route the suspects might have taken that night, looking for petrol receipts and witness evidence. CCTV cameras were plotted, in case the taped pictures hadn't been wiped (alas they had). And D/S Dave Sackman took himself off to the scrap yard where the remains of the van had ended up.

I was present at the afternoon management meeting when Dave returned. The smile suggested that *Becton* was about to take a giant step forward. Steve asked him what he'd got for him.

"I found the van", he said.



There was a brief silence, an exchange of looks around the table, then Dave reached into his jacket pocket and produced a spoon, carefully wrapped in an evidence bag. According to the scrap yard records, the victim's burned-out van had been sold to a recycling business in the West Midlands, where the remains had been melted down and turned into cutlery. Even Steve was laughing.

At this point in the investigation, *Becton* began to suffer from information overload. A torrent of evidence, much of it hearsay, was beginning to come in from the guys on the street. This confirmed that the victim had found himself in the eye of a particularly vicious storm. He, like the lead suspect, was an alleged housebreaker. He had a habit of letting people down, of getting on their nerves. He was unreliable, devious, and may – or may not – have burned someone's house down. Either way, it seemed he'd come in for regular beatings, both in and out of prison, often at the hands of the two lead suspects. One of these beatings allegedly involved a hammer. Another time the victim's head was apparently smashed against a concrete post, damaging him badly enough to put him in hospital. Steve was right. Poor choice of company.

It wasn't until the afternoon that the interviews began again. The interviewing teams were feeding in fresh evidence, hoping to leverage an admission or two. News that his car and trailer had been seized appeared to shake the lead suspect who promptly went No Comment. The other guy, who'd gone No Comment from the off, was equally unhelpful.

By now, Andy Harrington's Intel Cell were slowly piecing together the web of phone calls that might tell the story of the victim's final hours. This painstaking plotting of one call against another was far from complete but he was reasonably certain that the coming days and weeks would supply the missing pieces in the evidential jigsaw. The victim, it seemed clear, had once again overstepped the mark. In Steve's view, it seemed that everyone had a motive - whether it was arson, theft or sex – to sort the victim out. In the end, he said, *Becton* was dealing with a beating that got out of hand. "This is something that went way over the top," he said. "And now we have to

bottom it out.”

The following day happened to be a Saturday. The investigation had been at full throttle since Tuesday. The D/S in charge of Outside Inquiries, John Murray, hadn't had a day off since Christmas. At eight o'clock in the morning, Steve conferenced with his two Tactical Interview Advisers. To press charges, he needed either an admission of guilt from the two suspects, an admission from someone else, or conclusive forensic linking either or both to the dead victim. In all three cases, the interview teams had so far drawn a blank. Both TIAs agreed that there was nothing left to throw at these guys and that there was therefore no point in going to the magistrates court for a final 36-hour extension.

Steve nodded. He needed to clear the ground beneath *Becton's* feet. He wanted to review the evidence, consolidate what seemed useful, and plot investigative pathways forward. He ordered the washing machines in both the suspects' premises to be seized for full forensic analysis. The work on the car and the trailer was on-going. Under the circumstances, there was no point in hanging on to either prisoner. That morning they were both granted police bail and told to report back in twelve week's time.

Later that day, I met one of the D/Cs who'd been with the lead suspect when he got the news that he was to be released. How had he reacted? “The guy broke down,” he said. “Completely lost it. Blubbed. Shook hands. Wanted to see his mate. The works.” So had he expected to walk free? “Fuck no, of course not.”

I passed this news on to Steve. It didn't appear to surprise him.

Nearly three weeks later, Steve invited me to an all-day review of *Becton's* progress to date. A series of power-point presentations established that the victim was probably killed at the Deposition Site in the woods, and had died from asphyxia having been garrotted by the bungee cord. He'd got the knife wounds the same night but the broken rib was an older injury.

The blood in the lead suspect's kitchen had turned out to be animal, seemingly the household cat tormented by fleas, and there'd

been no indications of a cleaned-up crime scene. There followed a detailed profile of the victim and a fast-expanding army of suspects from Andy Harrington.

The victim, he said, had mental health issues, drug issues, and childhood issues. He moved from address to address and never stayed longer than six weeks. He spent most of his life in the middle of a web of stolen goods, sundry drugs, and unsettled debts. He was regularly beaten up by a number of associates, sometimes for good reason, sometimes because they fancied it. These guys, who were all in the frame for the killing, included petty thieves, fences, drunks, drug dealers, shoplifters, fraudsters, housebreakers, psychopaths and serial shaggers. As a cast list for novels to come, as you might imagine, this gave me serious pause for thought.

The *Becton* review ended with a longish list of to-do items which would carry the investigation forward. They included offender profiling, further cell-site analysis, an extended trawl for witnesses, a possible slot on *Crimewatch*, and the preparation of detailed interview packages ahead of the re-arrest of the lead suspects and perhaps others.

The arrests were made two months later on the morning of Tuesday 3<sup>rd</sup> April. More than a year later, two men stood trial at Winchester Crown Court.

On 31 May 2002, Raymond John Hunt and Paul Fawley were convicted of murder. As far as the judge could determine, Hunt had an argument in the victim's van and stabbed him. The victim begged to be taken to hospital. Instead, Hunt phoned Fawley to enlist his help. They met and drove in convoy to the wood where the victim was strangled. Both Hunt and Fawley then headed south to the Fareham industrial estate and set fire to the victim's van.

Both men later made representations for a minimum term sentence, by which time they both admitted involvement in the murder. According to Hunt, Fawley strangled the victim while Hunt looked on in horror. According to Fawley, Hunt strangled the victim while Fawley stood by in shock. Dismissing their representations, the judge sentenced them both to imprisonment for life. He also complemented

the Operation *Becton* squad, under its SIO Det Supt Steve Watts, for their diligence and expedition.

There's a postscript to *Becton* which deserves a mention. Once the jury had retired to consider their verdict, Steve got a note from the victim's family. They wanted a meet. Steve and John Murray, the D/S who'd handled Outside Enquiries, were happy to oblige. The victim's sister, who'd maintained close contact with the unfolding enquiry through *Becton*'s Family Liaison Officers, said how surprised she'd been that the police had gone to so much bother over someone who'd had a record like her brother's. Whatever the verdict, she wanted Steve and his team to know that she and the family were grateful for the efforts they'd made, and presented him with a small glass plaque inscribed with thanks from the family. "I was really touched," Steve told me later. "You always do your best but a gesture like that really matters."

## Four

As you might have gathered, the experience of shadowing Operation *Becton* was a bit of a turning point in my career as a crime writer. The above account is, at best, a summary of those insanely busy days and doesn't begin to tally the sheer volume of evidential detail that an investigation like this must necessarily throw up. Slightly dazed by it all, I came away with a genuine admiration for any conductor who can keep an orchestra like *Becton's* in tune. Whatever the pressure, Steve Watts marshalled his troops with a confidence that was itself remarkable. If you live in Hampshire and are unlucky enough to have someone you love murdered, you'll get quality service. If, on the other hand, some drunken scrote kicks your wing mirror to pieces in the middle of the night, you might be disappointed by what doesn't happen afterwards.

So where next for my fictional hero? I knew by now that force-wide there were seven D/Is on Major Crimes. So why shouldn't Joe Faraday be one of them?

At this point I needed to float the idea past one of my many new contacts. His name was John Ashworth and – guess what – he was a D/I on Major Crimes. He'd come highly recommended by J-R and we'd already met a couple of times before I embarked on the near-vertical learning curve that was *Becton*. John Ashworth, said J-R, was a bit of a loner, a bit of a maverick. He was deeply pro-active, played his cards extremely close to his chest, and rarely shared information with anyone. This sounded like a bit of a handicap when it came to letting me into his professional world but I waited a couple of days for J-R to put a word in then lifted the phone. John Ashworth invited me along to his office at Kingston Crescent and the moment I stepped in I knew that J-R was on the money. This guy had madness in his eyes.

As it happens, I love people on the edge. They're prone to make instant judgments and if they decide you're OK you'll never look back. John, I think, decided I was OK. We talked for maybe an hour and it quickly became apparent that he enjoyed poking the organisation in all

kinds of ways that didn't necessarily marry with accepted procedure. The two phrases I scribbled in my notebook were "impatient as fuck" and "tight as a clam".

This was a guy, as J-R had promised, who liked nothing better than to grab an inquiry, make it his own, shield it from all interference, and conjure a result. I sensed there was a little of Paul Winter in this approach but John Ashworth was a thinker, too, and that put him squarely on Faraday's patch. Like both my guys, John had no patience with time-serving or what he termed "all the managerial bollocks." In his view, there was a lot to being a good detective that you simply couldn't teach. You went into every situation – managerial or otherwise – watching your back. With the bad guys you were wise not to think in black and white. You had to talk and keep talking. You had to regard everyone as a potential source of priceless information and develop ways of winking it out of them. Above all, he said, you had to be thinking *enemy* all the time.

Paranoia, in John's case, is too meager a word. He really did regard himself as the sole recruit in some private army – or at least I thought he did until I began to get to know him better and realized that he had a great deal of time for a handful of fellow detectives including the scary Steve Watts and the matchless Andy Harrington. These were can-do guys, very much in the John Ashworth mould, and liked nothing better than cracking-on. So where would this developing series of meets lead me?

Early on, I sussed that John's preparedness to share anything remotely confidential in terms of the Job was strictly limited. He'd be more than happy to tell me how useless he was when faced with a promotions board. Once, given some twat scenario for which he he'd just been allotted ten minutes to prepare an Operations Order, he politely slid the sheet of paper back across the desk. Why? Because the circumstances described bore absolutely no resemblance to real life. "Strategic perspectives" was another phrase that made him laugh. What the fuck did "strategic perspectives" actually mean? Where was a "strategic perspective" when you really needed one?

This was a lovely mind-set, tailor-made for the kind of fiction I

wanted to write, but when it came to real secrets John would eyeball me for a second or two then offer a regretful shake of the head. No way would he open up about who really ran the cocaine scene in Pompey. Neither would he volunteer a single detail of any of his current jobs. This was naturally a bit of a disappointment but as we got to know each other we evolved a mutual understanding that served as makeshift rules of engagement. Procedural stuff was never a problem. He'd explain why things happened the way they did and exactly where I might find an opportunity to go off-piste. When it came to sorting out the kind of story I wanted to tell I could ping ideas off him and he'd tell me where – in real life – it wouldn't work. Once I'd finished the first draft of whatever novel I happened to be writing he'd be more than happy to read it. Beyond that, we'd have another pint, get a bit more pissed and laugh a lot.

By now it was summer. *Becton* was en route to the Crown Court and I was sitting on the beach wondering how to put Joe Faraday to the test. There was no way I wasn't going to build in all that *Becton* research but I knew that I had to avoid the real facts of the case. The last thing I wanted was 400 pages of Pompey low life featuring a shallow grave, a bungee cord and a couple of cable ties.

By now, thanks partly to conversations I'd had with members of the *Becton* squad, I'd become very aware of a growing problem with kids in the city. They appeared on the police radar because they generated so much aggravation – a mix of shoplifting, other forms of petty theft, and randomly pointless acts of criminal damage. These were the kids who set fire to waste bins and empty properties, who took a perverse glee in keying brand new cars, who nicked charity boxes from shops and church halls, who found their way onto the tops of Pompey's soaring municipal tower blocks and bombarded passers-by with little splatty bomblets of dog shit rolled in Kleenex, who hung around on the street just waiting for trouble, or the opportunity to hurry it along. They were also into graffiti and there came a moment when this vague curiosity of mine hardened into something more focused.

This was a kid I judged to be in his early teens. He was thin: torn

jeans, stained hoodie, brand new Nikes. He was using a black aerosol on the freshly painted wall surrounding an up-market apartment block. *Do the Planet a Favour*, he scrawled. *Kill Yourself*.

This was either class war or street wisdom straight out of the existentialist handbook. It might have belonged in an Albert Camus novel. I needed to talk to someone in the know, like a social worker. J-R's partner, Rhona Lucas, sounded perfect. Part detective, part priest, she worked with persistent young offenders in the city. We met at the Brook Centre, an unlovely building in the heart of Somerstown, one of Pompey's dodgier areas. A boy of maybe nine was sitting in the play area, spinning his chair this way and that, kicking out aimlessly at anything he could reach. From down the corridor came the thunder of drums. When I asked Rhona what was going on she told me it was an anger management class. Better to have lots of noise, she said, than yet another bill for broken furniture.

Later we talked about the boy in the chair. We'll call him Mattie. He hadn't been to school for more than two years but he was a champion shoplifter, regularly emptying Woolies of Pokemon cards, and had near-professional tumbling skills. He'd spent most of his young life on the run from various authority figures, and had lately been adopted by a gang of older boys who'd taught him how to TWOC cars.

I asked about his family. Hadn't any one been in touch with them? Rhona looked pained. A succession of step fathers had driven this lad onto the streets. Only this week, Rhona had tried to get in touch with mum but her phone had been cut off after non-payment of the bill and she'd run out of credit on her mobile. A couple of visits had drawn a volley of abuse through a locked door. The last remaining option was some kind of letter but that was also a non-starter because the woman couldn't read.

Mattie was a child, said Rhona, who'd grown up in the bareness of a flat without a table. He'd never sat down to share a meal. His mother, beset by issues of her own, was hopeless as a provider and as a result young Mattie was almost permanently hungry. He'd learned how to beg money in pub gardens during the summer, and he



knew he could eat food straight off the supermarket shelves without troubling the lady at the checkout, but living hand to mouth like this had turned him into a loner. He doesn't let strangers close, she said. His behaviour can be seriously challenging. I nodded. I was still looking at Mattie, at the ever-revolving chair, at the flailing legs. She might have been talking about a wild animal.

This image stayed with me for weeks to come. Thanks to Rhona I began to meet other kids, hear other stories. I was also put in touch with other workers in the field, men and women as patient as experienced as Rhona herself. One of them had done time himself, a couple of years inside for violence and affray that had sharpened his understanding of what was going so badly wrong. This is what he told me.

“What you've got to understand is that these aren't deprived kids, kids starved of offers of help. They might have had a shit upbringing, or no upbringing at all, but now they're surrounded by people who genuinely want to make a difference. We're talking the whole pack of cards here: the Old Bill, social workers, church people, educational welfare, probation, down-home do-gooders, the lot. But it doesn't work and you know why? Because these kids are beyond feeling, beyond reach. They haven't a clue about structure or boundaries. They've become insensate. They don't give a stuff about the causes or consequences of what they do, about the kinds of lives they lead. But what they have going for them is what they share, what they all agree on, and that's about how empty and fucking pointless most of life is. These kids are in it for the laugh, for the crack, for each other. They love money, or the idea of money, because they figure it'll buy them anything: freedom, excitement, status, pleasure, even a moment or two of power. That's all bollocks, and they'll twig it in the end, but in the meantime these kids are really dangerous – and you know why? Because they have no fear.”

This keyed in with something that had just happened to my youngest son, Jack. He was at uni in Manchester studying psychology. A couple of weeks earlier, while he was taking a bath in the shared student house, his mate had answered a knock on the

front door. The next thing Jack knew was a black guy with a gun telling him to get out of the bath. Naked, face down on the hall carpet, he waited for half an hour with the gun to his head while the guy's accomplice took debit cards to the nearest ATM. If the PIN numbers were wrong, Jack and his mate would get a bullet each. That evening he lost £200, his lap top, and one or two other items. He didn't sleep much for the next week or so and spent a lot of time trying to figure out what it took to pull a stunt like this.

The attending police were moderately sympathetic but pointed out that students were easy marks. These kind of stuff, they said, was happening more and more often. In the end, more for his own peace of mind than anything else, Jack settled on an explanation of sorts. The word he used on the phone was anomie. According to Wikipedia, anomie described "the breakdown of social bonds between an individual and their community ties, with fragmentation of social identity and rejection of self-regulatory [values](#)". A bit wordy, perhaps, but near-perfect for what I was picking up in my conversations around Pompey. Anomie, indeed.

And so Mattie, and all the other Matties, became Doodie. Doodie is 11 years old. He hasn't seen the inside of a classroom for a very long time. His mum is on the game to pay her smack bills. A series of step-dads have driven him onto the streets. Near-feral, young Doodie is well known to a selection of taxi-drivers, pub doormen, bus drivers, park rangers, postmen, and the nice man at a supermarket bakery who gives him hot rolls round the back in return for the promise of unspecified sexual favours.

Doodie is deeply streetwise. In winter, he knows the safest places to kip: chiefly abandoned buildings with ill-fitting windows and dodgy locks. When it gets really cold, he sleeps on the floor of a council flat occupied by an 18 yr old prostitute. By and large he knows how to avoid trouble, especially from the mad and the bad and the crazy old guy who always wants to set his dog on you, but a couple of times he's been nicked by the police. This doesn't bother him in the least. On the first occasion, when he was just eight, they couldn't use handcuffs because his wrists were too small. The second time, they

had to give him a box to stand on in the dock. When the magistrates read the social worker's report and put him in council care, he absconded within a week.

At the point when the book starts, Doodie is shoplifting to order for 50p a hit. Some way down the road, when he's scored enough moolah, he plans to buy himself a convertible BMW, a big yacht, and one of them Royal Navy destroyers he's sometimes seen on Pompey Harbour. He especially likes the *idea* of the destroyer. Something to do with the name.

Doodie turned out to be the starting point for Book Three. I called it *Angels Passing*, after a French phrase I'd come across. When conversation suddenly dries up for no reason at all, people in France look at each other and say "*un ange passe*" or "an angel just flew by". This sudden moment of silence beyond comprehension seemed to me the perfect expression of what the book might set out to try and explore. Has it come to this? Is it *this* bad?

I have a very good friend in Pompey called Dave Cook. Dave is a gifted film-maker and was teaching media studies at one of the city's FE colleges. Portsmouth born and bred, he was in daily touch with Pompey youth and loved the idea of Doodie nearly as much as I did. Between us, we pondered where he might be kipping just now. I'd picked up rumours that kids like Doodie, effectively off the radar, had moved into the shell of the old ABC cinema, now boarded-up and awaiting demolition. Between us, we agreed it was worth a visit. Dave laid hands on a torch. We both wore heavy boots. Dave drove me down to the cinema and parked up.

Months later, as the first draft of *Angels Passing* gathered speed and headed for the final pages, my series D/I finds himself doing something remarkably similar.

*Faraday laced on a pair of the boots he used for birding and tested the big torch he'd borrowed from one of the uniformed sergeants at Highland Road. According to Imber, there was an unsecured window round the side, the favoured entry for local kids. He crossed the road and skirted the front of the building. The window Imber had mentioned*

was masked by a line of bushes. Someone had been at the security boards with a crowbar and the splintered remains lay in the deep concrete gully that separated the path from the window.

Feeling slightly ridiculous, Faraday checked behind him before straddling the gully. With one leg on the sill, he was committed. There were still tiny shards of glass in the window frame and he briefly regretted leaving his gloves in the car before taking the weight of his body on his arms and swinging his other leg across the gully. Seconds later, out of breath, he was catching his balance on the line of concrete steps inside.

The stairs led downwards into darkness. Underfoot, in the light from the window, he could see more broken glass. Dimly, where the light gave out, a radiator had been ripped from the wall and now hung drunkenly outwards, secured by pipe work alone. He flicked on the torch, tracking the beam to the right until it settled on some kind of door. The place smelled of damp and neglect. Stand absolutely still, ignore the low rumble of traffic from the road outside, and for a moment he thought he heard movement.

Faraday stepped carefully downwards, the crunch-crunch of glass echoing back from the stairwell. He pushed at the door and it began to open. Inside he felt a sudden chill, and the soft clunk of the door as it closed behind him brought the torch beam whirling round. Take it easy, he thought. Ten metres away from the pavement and already this place has got you spooked.

He edged towards the wall and swept the torch beam across the yawning space ahead. This had once been one of the smaller cinemas, Screen Two or Three. He could remember sitting here in this same darkness, J-J beside him, settling into a Steve Martin comedy or one of the Oliver Stone movies. "Platoon" had been a favourite of J-J's. The dialogue had been beyond him but he could sit and watch the action sequences for hours on end. Faraday's torch at last found the long curve of the back wall which had once served as the screen. This was where Charlie Sheen had confronted the realities of Vietnam. And this was where J-J had upset an entire bucket of popcorn when the Viet Cong sprang their major ambush.

*The noise again. Footsteps this time. Definitely. Faraday felt his pulse begin to quicken as he followed the strip of carpet up the ramp towards the back of the cinema. The carpet was wet underfoot and twice he detoured to avoid little curls of turd. Another door him into some kind of vestibule. He paused, listening for movement, then called out, mapping the wreckage around him with the torch. There was more glass, abandoned bottles, crushed cans of Castlemaine and Special Brew, and a pile of charred wood that must once have been a door frame. There was a smell too, more distinctive this time. It was a bitter, acrid stench that tugged at his throat, and he tried to visualize living amongst this chaos. Would people really try and make a home for themselves here? Was life that bad that you'd trade sunshine and fresh air for this sour darkness?*

*He stood absolutely still for minutes on end, listening. Faintly, he could hear the wail of a car alarm. It went on for thirty seconds or so, then stopped. When nothing else happened – no footsteps, no sign of movement – he picked his way across the vestibule and down a shallow flight of steps at the end. It was lighter here, and as he rounded the corner he could hear traffic again. Then he stopped. Before him lay the cinema's foyer. The ticket booths and popcorn bar were in ruins, everything smashed. A false wall had been wrenched away and kicked to pieces. Tiles, broken glass and lengths of splintered wood spiked with rusting nails littered the floor, and the area near the boarded-up doors was ankle deep in more empty cans, Stella this time.*

*Faraday was trying to remember the layout of the old cinema. He'd been right about Screens Two and Three, he was sure, but the biggest screen was upstairs. Maybe that was where the kids hung out. Waiting, as ever, for the main attraction.*

*Not bothering to hide his presence, he pulled a length of timber aside and cleared a path for himself up the stairs. At the top, through the sagging remains of the big double doors, he found himself in another vestibule. The floor was covered with cladding ripped away from cable runs and there were bare wires hanging from the ceiling. Off to the right, exactly where his memory suggested, was another*

door and another flight of steps. It was dark again, pitch black, and he took the stairs one at a time, only too aware of Anghared's warning. The place is structurally unsound, she'd said, closing their last conversation with a sigh.

At the top of the stairs, he knew he'd found Screen One. The long black curve of the ramp stretched away into the darkness. Stripped of seats, it seemed to go on forever. He edged slowly forward down the long emptiness of the ramp, the light from the torch pooling at his feet. Then, without warning, the light from the torch abruptly diffused, dropping into nowhere. Faraday stopped, chilled to the bone, rocking back on his heels. Before him was a void, a chasm so sudden and so deep that the torch beam couldn't locate the floor below. Anghared had been right. This place was a death trap.

Faraday closed his eyes, trying to still his racing pulse, telling himself that he was OK, that he'd got away with it, then he began to step sideways, easing back from the void. He tracked the torch to the left, looking for the door that would take him back to the vestibule, and as he did so he spotted a shape in the darkness. The torch was shaking in his hand. He couldn't hold it steady. He was looking at a tent. It was a ridge tent, green, sagging, not big, and it was about a dozen paces away. He swallowed hard. Who in his right mind would camp out in a place like this?

Much later, after a great deal of reader reaction to *Angels Passing*, it became clear that this scene lay at the very heart of the book. People talked about it all the time. Because Dave and I had been in there, doing exactly what Faraday did, I managed to get all the details, all the spookiness, right. That was a lesson in itself – research really does pay off - but on reflection I began to sense that this handful of pages also caught something bigger. Readers seemed to recognise that there was something deeply shocking about this grotesque ruin, this palace of shattered dreams, something that mirrored the society these kids had so emphatically rejected. The picture house had become a camp site for the dispossessed. We'd uprooted these kids. We'd turned them into ghosts and left them in the

dark.

The rest of the research schedule wrote itself. I met a couple of older lads who screwed a living from housebreaking and thefts from vehicles. A beleaguered teacher from one of the inner city comps gave me a combat report from the front line. The guy who headed the force Child Protection Unit shared the policing challenges of dealing with kids like Doodie. A uniformed beat officer gave me a conducted tour of an area called Foxes' Forest on Hilsea Lines where I planned a particularly gruesome murder. Jason Goodwin, a Senior Technician at the city's mortuary, talked me through the full post-mortem process, while Bob Lamburne, one of Hantspol's top forensic officers, explained exactly what he'd be looking for back at the Crime Scene amongst the trees on Hilsea Lines.

By now the plot had virtually shaped itself. I needed more information on bare-knuckle fighting behind some of the city's closed doors, and I also needed to find out about the pecking order amongst the clergy at the Anglican cathedral. Both were easier to come by than you might imagine and I wound up in one of the lifts at Ladywood House, a towering block of inner city flats.

As ever, the people in charge of this particular fictional opportunity couldn't have been more helpful. I ascended to the 23<sup>rd</sup> floor where I was planning to kick off the scene that would end the book. Two flights of concrete stairs led up to a door that accessed the roof. There was a drying area, and a kind of parapet. If you scrambled on top of the parapet, like Doodie would, you could stand up, brace yourself against the wind, and then look clear across the city and the Solent to the Isle of Wight. It was a moment I knew I'd never forget, partly because I was terrified of looking down, and partly because I sensed already that this book was going to be special.

The first draft of *Angels Passing* arrived on my editor's desk a week or two before Christmas. Simon liked it a lot. Word spread in-house in the way that writers - always the outsiders - never fully understand. A decision appeared to have been taken to make *Angels Passing* the break-out book. Break-out meant big time. Stay tuned.

The first hint of the promotional firestorm to come arrived two months into the New Year. Publicity executives arrived from London for a pre-campaign meet with Portsmouth *News* editor Mike Gilson. The warmth of the Orion commitment, expressed in plans for large space advertorial, reader offers and publication day competitions, did wonders for my reputation on the city's daily paper. I was no longer the scruffy guy who filed 700 words of left-wing copy every week but – to quote a top Orion honcho – I'd become "the latest addition to the ranks of crime fiction's grandmasters".

This was deeply flattering, but there was lots more. The following month, the cover shot that would badge the hardback of *Angels Passing*, a shot I'd taken myself in a bid to root the novel squarely in Pompey, featured on the front of the Orion New Titles catalogue, a six monthly publication that went to thousands of trade outlets nationwide. Inside, amongst 200 other titles, *Angels Passing* had won itself a full page. *The Take* had recently been picked by the *Independent on Sunday* as one of the five best crime novels of 2001, and this announcement anchored the copy. The promotional master plan, I was glad to see, included large space colour advertising in both national and regional newspapers, a full point-of-sale package, plus the promise of "author events and signings".

The Doodie bandwagon gathered speed. In April, a press day in Portsmouth attracted a number of journos including Ralph Baxter from *Publishing News*. His diary piece appeared a week later. I was a bit clueless about why all this stuff mattered but Simon assured me that the trade press would be the key to the planned break-out. I had to get noticed by the top buyers. My name had to be out there in lights. The fact that Orion were putting a great deal of promotional money behind me was enough to get a lot of people talking but to get to where Orion really wanted me to be I had to become a brand. A *brand*? Christ.

It was at this point that Orion decided to make a film about me and my book. The in-house sales conference was the hinge on the marketing door, a two-day opportunity to gather all the reps and the key execs together and fire them up for the coming round of sell-ins. The next sales conference was to be held at Eastbourne's Grand Hotel



in May. It would kick off with a big dinner and a band afterwards. The following morning, these people needed to be wised up about the current crop of major titles. *Angels Passing* was very definitely one of them.

Starring in my own movie after twenty years in television production was a bit of a novelty. I reproduce the script in full because this experience marked the moment when I really did think I'd cracked it. With a forty grand promotional budget, national ads, and all sorts of other goodies, there was no way I wasn't about to step into scribe heaven.

*Scene One: Portsdown Hill*

SLOW REVEAL TO GH FROM CITY BELOW

*"This is Portsmouth, Joe Faraday's Pompey, one of the world's great naval cities. It was built for war, and the business of war, and even now daily life is splintered by a preoccupation with violence.*

*190,000 people live down there, banded up together in one of the most densely-populated pockets of land in Europe.*

*Where better to set a series of crime thrillers?"*

*Scene Two: Langstone Shore*

TRACK BACK WITH GH ALONG TOWPATH PAST THE  
BARGEMASTER'S HOUSE

*"This is where Faraday lives – and this is as quiet as Pompey gets. Joe Faraday is in his forties. He's a Detective Inspector. And he's been living in that house for the last 22 years.*

*Back in the late Seventies, he had a son, J-J, who was born deaf. Faraday's wife, Janna, died soon afterwards and so Faraday brought the child up virtually single-handed. Not just a child but a deaf child.*

*How do you penetrate that silence? How do you build a bridge to somebody you love who speaks only the language of gesture? You look for a common interest. And Faraday chose birds."*

## CUT TO BIRDS ON THE HARBOUR

*“The world of nature, here on Faraday’s doorstep, is what keeps him sane. Like most cops, he’s become an expert on what we’re collectively doing to each other. Detectives are the guy who clear up the mess – the thefts, the stabbings, the rapes, the murders – and as society begins to disintegrate, it’s cops like Faraday who find themselves with a ringside seat.”*

## GH TO CAM

*“Which brings us to an attractive 14 year-old called Helen Bassam.”*

*Scene Three: ext Ladywood Flats*

TILT UP FROM CHALKED BODY OUTLINE ON THE PAVEMENT  
TO GH TO CAM

*“It’s February. It’s dawn. And at the foot of these inner city flats, a milkman has found the body of a teenage girl. As the senior detective on call, Faraday attends. Scenes of Crime are already at work. The body has been screened off. Uniforms keep passers-by moving on. And Faraday? He heads for the roof.”*

*Scene Four: roof, Ladywood Flats*

PAN ACROSS ROOF DISCOVERS GH TO CAM

*“But one look up here is enough to confirm that going off this roof wouldn’t have been a simple proposition. What on earth would have possessed a 14 year-old to clamber up onto that parapet? Was she drunk? Was she depressed? Was she doing it for a laugh? Or – far more to the point – was there someone else involved?”*

*Scene Five: interior lift going down*

DESCENDING LIGHTS ON PANEL. THEN GH TO CAM

*“Already, like any detective, Faraday is covering the usual bases. Door to door enquiries in these flats. ID and background on the girl. Interviews with her parents and her mates. And a good look at last night’s pictures from that little device up there....CCTV. This lift is interesting, by the way. This little bench at the back folds down and comes out – and you know why? To bring undertakers’ coffins down from the upstairs flats. Helen Bassam, of course, saved them the trouble. As Faraday himself reflects.”*

*Scene Six: int. CID office, Southsea Police station.*

WIDE SHOT: CID OFFICE

*“This is Southsea police station – and this is where Faraday works. His office is out there at the end of the corridor but it’s in here, in the CID office, that his squad will try and piece together the sequence of events that led to Helen Bassam’s death.*

*In a perfect world, of course, there’d be no distractions. But Faraday’s world is far from perfect and for him and his squad of detectives Pompey never ceases to be a fast-moving target.”*

*Scene Seven: Foxes’ Forest, Hilsea lines*

PULL BACK FROM TREES TO DISCOVER GH TO CAM

*“Within twenty four hours, another phone call and another body. This time it’s a man in his twenties found here, on top of Hilsea Lines, one of the countless fortifications thrown up around Pompey to keep the French at bay.*

*The body is naked except for a pair of woman’s knickers and it’s dangling on the end of rope. Suicide or murder? Once again, Faraday must rally his troops, gather his evidence and try and tease some sense – some pattern – into the violence and chaos that increasingly passes for real life in a city like this.*

*No wonder he finds solace in the birds...”*

*Scene Eight: the Round Tower overlooking the mouth of  
Portsmouth Harbour*

START WITH GULLS. REVEAL GH TO CAM

***“Angels Passing*** is the third Joe Faraday novel.

*Emotionally, because of the years he’s devoted to his deaf son, Faraday suffers from a kind of arrested development. Women he knows are quietly surprised at his naivety, at his determination – rare in a cop – to believe the best about people. Every book puts that optimism, that faith, to the test – and **Angels Passing** is the biggest test of all.*

*Does he make it? Does he get to the bottom of either death? No clues. No conferring. But I can tell you this. There’s a lot more of Joe Faraday – and a lot more of Pompey – to come.”*

The sales conference came and went. I got pissed, like everyone else, and, like everyone else, wondered about nicking the crested toweling robe from the en suite bathroom in my room. I don’t know what kind of deal Orion got on the room rates but there was clearly more money in publishing than I’d thought.

Double page ads went into the trade press ahead of the reps’ sell-in, as promised, and 300 advance reading copies were dispatched to key bookshop managers world wide. This was accompanied by a personal letter from Orion founder and CEO, Anthony Cheetham. I especially liked the bit about my 130,000 words offering readers “a breathtaking and harrowing ride”. Doodie again. His fault.

In June, five months ahead of publication, 800 copies of a classy 4-page presenter was mailed to the sales force for distribution to bookshops. Headed *Operation Bestseller*, this *faux* CID briefing outlined the promotional campaign already underway. It was a clever piece of design, beautifully produced, and would doubtless convince every bookseller in the country to make shelf-space for my little tome.

By September, Orion were beating the *Angels Passing*

promotional drum louder than ever. A special lunch in London to meet the key crime reviewers. Local and national media interviews. A blitz on specialist crime magazines and internet sites.

Then, with a blast of promotional trumpets, came the October publication day. As teams of girlies distributed chapter samplers and 2000 postcards featuring *The Take* to rush hour commuters at Waterloo Station, nearly 200 specially invited guests gathered at Portsmouth Cathedral to lift a glass to Doodie and the book that was going to make his (and my) name. The Canon of the cathedral, a fictional liberty on my part, features importantly towards the end of *Angels Passing* and the diocesan authorities had been only too happy to offer the cathedral for our launch party.

I'd invited every cop who'd lent a hand over the past three books to come along for the launch and I watched them checking out the display boards that lined the nave. I'd taken a series of moody photos of various Pompey locations, matching them with reproduced quotes from the book, and there was part of me, ever-curious, that wondered what they made of all this carefully orchestrated hoopla. They, like me, had always been slightly sceptical about the real impact any work of fiction can make, yet here was the living proof that all those interviews, and all that note-taking, hadn't been in vain. Here's one of the reproduced quotes. Rather fittingly, it centered on Nigel Phillimore, my fictional Canon with whom Faraday has a number of key exchanges about Doodie.

*At first, the priest had been guarded about the boy. It really wasn't his business to do Faraday's work for him and there were consequences that he, Phillimore, was obliged to respect. Nonetheless, it was incontestable that Doodie had severed the mooring rope that ties the individual to society. His father had become a stranger. His mother had given up. His teachers had begged for his exclusion. And so there was no one – no agency, no individual, not even the saintly Anghared – whom Doodie regarded as anything but a traitor. The child was on the run behind enemy lines. He trusted nobody. Five years earlier, in Phillimore's opinion, he might have*

*been diagnosed autistic. In five years time he would, in all probability, be behind bars. But for now he was one of those rare creatures who didn't know the meaning of either restraint or fear.*

The evening was a big success. We drank a lot of wine that night, during and after the launch. Loads of guests came back to our place to start partying in earnest and I remember telling Lin as we finally staggered up to bed that it probably wouldn't get better than this. Enjoy, I said, as my head hit the pillow.

As it turned out, this drunken *aperçu* was absolutely on the money. Orion couldn't have done more to give *Angels Passing* the biggest of promotional launches. After publication day came the promised media interviews, library and reader group events, plus umpteen stock signings at bookshops up and down the country. To justify a spend like this – not just money but time and effort – the book had to make it into the Top Ten. It didn't. It sold OK, gathered fabulous reviews, attracted a lot of attention on the festival circuit, and began to appear in translation abroad. But it didn't scale the required retail heights.

Within months, with a new three-book contract in my pocket, I was beginning to wonder what to write next. My brief glimpse of best-sellerdom had done my confidence the world of good, and I knew I could at least hold my own in the punchy world of crime fiction, but I knew something else as well. That when it comes to the magic break-out, when you tip-toe into publishing's Garden of Eden, you only get one bite of the apple.

## *Five*

Every new book comes from a different place in that hall of mirrors that passes for my brain. A book called *Sabbathman*, for instance, came from the title itself. It sparked a stand-alone thriller about the settling of political blood debts but the moment the word “Sabbathman” popped into my head, much of the structural work was done. Other books have seeded themselves after a conversation overheard in a pub or on a bus. Yet more force themselves on me after the glimpse of a face crossing the road, or the reading of a particular article. This setting fire to the dry kindling of the imagination has always fascinated me and the book which maybe throws most light on the process turned out to *Deadlight*, number four in the Faraday series.

It's Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> April, 1982. Twenty four hours earlier, the Argentineans have invaded the Falkland Islands and now, on a grey weekend afternoon, a mate and I are in a dinghy, bobbing around on Portsmouth Harbour, watching a succession of Harrier jets landing onto HMS *Hermes*. The noise is deafening. Beyond the carrier, on the quayside, we can see a human chain of matelots passing box after box of supplies aboard. Down below, though we don't know it yet, engineers are desperately trying to sort out problems in the engine room. The Royal Navy, like the nation itself, has been caught

on the hop by a bunch of gauchos grabbing what they think is rightfully theirs. In ways that happen all too rarely, this is the stuff of history.

Two days later, a modest Task Force slips out through the harbour narrows and disappears into the greyness of the mist that shrouds the Solent. Families have gathered on the Round Tower that overlooks the harbour mouth, yet another of the tearful farewells that have marked the start of countless wars. Kids wave Union Jacks, available from the pavement below for a quid each. Wives and mums try to be brave. The atmosphere on this chilly late spring day is sombre. This is not a parade or a carnival or some kind of peacetime exercise. These men, to everyone's intense surprise, are going to war. For real.

As a documentary maker with one foot in the Current Affairs camp, I made a film about that weekend which went around the world. Over the coming weeks and months, as the war began in earnest, reports of the casualties, the dead and the maimed, anchored our nightly news magazine. Many of these men came from Portsmouth. Family and neighbours held candlelit vigils. Special services were held at churches across the city. Then, with equal abruptness, the war was over and won.

In high summer, elements of the Task Force returned to the UK. I was sitting on the wall of the Portsmouth Sailing Club compound when HMS *Glamorgan*, a County-class missile destroyer, limped back into the harbour. She'd taken an Exocet strike off East Falkland towards the end of the war and for an unforgettable moment the sight of this badly wounded warship stilled the flag-waving and the cheers. The patched-up hole in her hull was clearly visible. Men had died in the flame and chaos that followed the missile hit. In this, the most martial of cities, grown men were moved to tears.

A decade later, I was commissioned to make a series of films to mark the anniversary of that war. I devoted a couple of months to talking to men and women who'd fought in the campaign, then flew to the Falklands and spent three weeks meeting the Islanders, walking the battlefields, and trying to imagine for myself what it must have been like for both sides. There was a bareness about that landscape



that was, to me, the perfect setting for an experience that had taught so many people so much about themselves. The wind blew incessantly. There were no trees. It seemed always boggy under foot. And it was possible to walk all day and never set eyes on another human being. If you were prone to introspection, and you didn't much fancy the prospect of getting killed, the Falklands in the depths of winter would have been a very bad place to be.

Later, I returned with a film crew. By now, I'd decided to devote each film to the study of a particular moment during the war. The soundtrack, indeed the films themselves, would belong to the guys who took part. This, in a way, was the novelist's bid to get inside their heads and their hearts, to explore their memories, to find out how the war had changed them. There would be no commentary.

The series was called *In Time of War*. Of the six films that were transmitted, the one that made the most impact – both on me and the viewing public – was about the loss of HMS *Coventry*. This was a Type 42 destroyer that found itself in the line of fire on 25<sup>th</sup> May 1982. Deployed as a decoy for marauding Argentinean aircraft in the waters off Falkland Sound, she took three direct hits and sank within twenty minutes. Nineteen men died and many others were badly burned. The survivors, it quickly became apparent, hadn't just lost their shipmates. The place they called home had also gone.

Ten years later, the memories of that chill midwinter day in the South Atlantic were still raw. Many of these men lived in Pompey. I devoted a great deal of time trying to win their confidence and when I finally stitched together a composite account of their separate journeys through the conflict I was struck by just how tightly-knit a shipboard community like *Coventry's* could be.

Steaming south, said one of them, was an experience that truly concentrated your mind. Over the preceding months and years you might have taken part in countless exercises but nothing prepared you for the real thing. The day you sat in the mess and watched TV news pictures of HMS *Sheffield* on fire, was the day you began to wonder what it might be like to die.

This Type 42, a sister ship to *Coventry*, was supposed to be

immortal. Yet it had taken a single Exocet, launched from 25 miles away, to kill twenty of her crew and knock the ship itself out of the war. Under tow, six days later, she sank. If “Shiny Sheff” was already a gonna, went the buzz, what were the odds on *Coventry* surviving intact? “The pressures on the guys just grew and grew,” one Chief Petty Officer told me. “The loud ones went quiet. The quiet ones became jokers. None of us had fought a war before. None of us knew what to expect. Stuff like that finds you out. It tells you who you really are.”

The possibility that research like this might find its way into a Pompey-based crime series didn't occur to me until the tide of reviews for *Angels Passing*, generated by the Orion promotional push, began to recede. John Ashworth and I were having a catch-up pint or two. He'd been impressed by the modest splash the latest book had made and was curious to know what I planned next. I said I wasn't sure. In the end I'd kept Faraday on division for *Angels Passing*, and I sensed that the time had come for my fictional D/I to transfer to the Major Crime Team. This would suggest his involvement in a murder investigation but beyond that I was looking at a blank canvas.

We had a couple more beers while John talked about a long-running job that had swallowed months and months of investigative time. At least two men had died at the hands of a psychopath who'd already been tried and found guilty. This guy was now banged up on a life sentence but there were suspicions that he'd killed others. The link between the killer and his victims was the Royal Navy, and as the story developed my mind kept tracking back to all the conversations I'd had in the aftermath of the loss of HMS *Coventry*.

This was a world quite unlike any other I'd ever encountered, a world of nutty, of blueys, of Chuffs and Puffs and Jack Dusties, of ukkers and buzzes and shite hawks and the Oggie Song. This tight little fraternity of matelots (or “skates” as they were known in Pompey) lived together for months on end. They became very close, especially in wartime, and several of the blokes I'd talked to cheerfully admitted that they probably shared more secrets with some of their shipmates

than they did with their own families. This kind of kinship can last a lifetime, and often does, but with it goes an awareness of the kind of bloke who doesn't fit, the nutter who can make life afloat a misery, or – in John's case – the psychopath who can target someone young, someone vulnerable, cast a line baited with all kinds of goodies, and slowly reel him in.

I lived with this germ of an idea for a week or two. For a couple of decades I'd been aware of the lengthening shadow of the Falklands conflict. Wars change people in all kinds of ways and in a city as martial as Portsmouth that matters. Pompey families have long memories, yet another element in the mix that was slowly becoming a book.

What if I were to invent a Type 21 destroyer called HMS *Accolade* and send her south to the Falklands with other elements of the Task Force? What if the ship's crew were to include a scary middle-aged matelot with a fierce temper and few friends? What if this guy openly boasted of getting his way with younger, prettier, more vulnerable members of various ship's companies? What if the rawness of his appetites, coupled with his incandescent temper, terrified someone younger into compliance? And what if that on-going situation, for the victim, became impossible to live with? This, surely, would turn out to be a war within a war, potentially no less violent, and with consequences potentially no less terminal?

From the scribe's point of view I sensed at once that there were real possibilities in this plot. The story that was slowly beginning to emerge belonged body and soul to the city that was already established as a major player in the series as a whole. Pompey was built on blood and treasure. For centuries, generations of young and not-so-young men had been shipping out in search of death or glory. In this sense, the Falklands War campaign was simply the latest episode in a long chain of adventures that had begun with the *Mary Rose*, straddled Trafalgar and Jutland, and ended – for HMS *Accolade* – on a cold May morning within sight of Falkland Sound.

At this stage you need names. The older guy I called Sean Arthur Coughlin. He'd served aboard *Accolade* during the Falklands War and

later joined the Prison Service, bringing exactly the same MO to another community of banged-up males, many of them young and vulnerable. The reader, I'd already decided, would never meet this man alive. The discovery of his dead body anchors the first chapter. This is what he looked like.

*Coughlin was lying on his side on the carpet, his knees drawn up towards his chest, his hands knotted protectively across his groin. He was a big, flabby man, a couple of stones overweight, and there were curls of black body hair across the spread of his belly. The bruising to his rib cage purpled the white flesh and there were more bruises around his thighs and buttocks. A day's growth of beard darkened his lower face and a thin dribble of vomit had caked across his swollen chin. His eyes were open, gazing sightlessly across the soiled carpet. Even in life, he wouldn't have been a handsome man.*

Coughlin's onboard fancy I pictured as 18 year old Matthew Warren. He's blond, good-looking, and not that bright. His mates will know him as "Bunny". Coughlin, with different motives, will call him "Fluff". En route south, Warren will disappear overboard, presumed drowned.

I now have the bones of the story. En route to the Falklands, twenty years ago, a young matelot disappears overboard. For the Ministry of Defence, this is just another death, regrettable perhaps but quickly overtaken by all the bloodshed yet to come. His family and friends mourn him as one of the fallen. Few real questions are asked and none of those receive a proper answer. Two decades later, will the truth about Bunny Warren finally surface?

What I need to do next is fill in the background detail that must be rich enough to be credible. What roles will Coughlin and Warren play on board? What will give Coughlin the kind of access he needs to this callow young sailor? Where would they go when Coughlin fancies a shag? Who else would know – or at least sense – what might be going on? What happens at sea when someone goes missing? And just who plays sheriff aboard a ship like *Accolade*?

These are questions, it occurred to me, that will be equally as important to D/I Faraday. Hence my need to get the answers absolutely right.

At this stage, a major stroke of luck. Browsing the Sunday papers, my eye was caught by a brief review for a book called *Through Fire and Water*. The author, Mark Higgitt, was a journalist and – like me – he'd been fascinated by the Falklands War. HMS *Ardent* was a Type 21 that went down in Falkland Sound towards the end of the conflict. *Through Fire and Water's* 402 pages must surely offer a comprehensive account of life aboard.

I got hold of a copy of Mark's book. It was an excellent read in all kinds of ways and gave me a thorough grip of the geography of a Type 21. This is more important than you might think. If I was plotting a murder, or a chain of events set in – say – a hotel or a country house, then I'd need to be able to visualise all the elements of the building that have a bearing on the plot. Ditto HMS *Accolade*. I knew already that life aboard any warship is cramped and intimate to the point of claustrophobia. For the back-story to work, there had to be places where Coughlin could have his wicked way. Sadly, *Through Fire and Water* didn't extend to a guide to favoured on-board bogging spots but there were references in the text that offered a clue or two. The tiller flat, aft. Some of the on-deck storage areas after dark. Maybe even the tiny helo hanger. I scribbled a few notes but I needed more information. Time to talk to the guys who'd really know.

From my *Coventry* documentary, I already had contact details for men who'd served aboard in the Falklands campaign. *Coventry*, of course, was a Type 42 but these were guys who'd either done time in Type 21s, or who had mates who might be able to help. Some of the *Coventry* survivors lived in the Pompey area. I started making calls.

Broaching a plot like this to men who've been at the sharp end sounds, on the face of it, a tricky call. Asking a survivor about his long-ago war is one thing. Asking him to speculate about the activities of a predatory psychopath is quite another. I needn't have worried.

We'll call him Alex. He'd sailed south aboard *Coventry*. The moment I began to broach the thrust of the plot he nodded. Coughlin,

he said, would be a Killick Cook. He'd be big, nasty, in-your-face...in other words a total control freak. He'd have access to limitless quantities of booze, especially rum, disguising his drinking habits by mixing the stuff with Coke. With drink inside him, said Alex, Coughlin would be a monster. Most people would give him a wide berth and no one would ever grass him up to the Joss for fear of the consequences.

“Joss?”

“The Master-at-Arms.”

“Ah...” I made a note. The sheriff.

By now Alex was at full throttle. In terms of on-board entertainment, he said, Coughlin's favourite would be a game called Freckles. He didn't go into details but – as the name suggests – this apparently involved a whole bunch of guys around a table splatting quantities of human excrement. One of them, inevitably the loser, would be Bunny Warren.

Bunny himself, said Alex, would be a steward in the Two Delta mess. This would bring him physically within Coughlin's reach. Given his age and seniority, Coughlin would probably be President of the Mess, a role that would feed his hunger for power over others. Including, of course, young Bunny.

“What about runs ashore?”

“With Coughlin, you mean?”

“Yeah.”

“Total nightmare. This guy's a real shag-nasty. He has a problem working out where piss-ups end and torture begins. He's a bully. He drinks too much. He wants to hurt people, especially people who aren't about to answer back. That's where Bunny comes in. Coughlin will take a whole bunch of skates to some scabby bar. He'll have a whip round and pay the girl round the back to get Bunny's kit off. He wants the kid humiliated in front of everyone. He thinks it's funny. He's giving the kid the opportunity for a free shag. If he can't get it up, so much the better. That's the kind of animal Coughlin is.”

“This kind of stuff happens?”

“I never said that.”

“You're making it up?”

“I never said that, either.”

This, as you might imagine, was gold dust to the working novelist, proof that my plotting was far from fanciful. Now I wanted to know more about the on-board sheriff. I still have my notes, the key quotations underlined in green Pentel.

The Joss, said Alex, would be the kind of guy who commanded respect. His job was to keep good order amongst a bunch of testosterone-fuelled matelots. He'd be even-tempered. He'd have an acute sense of anticipation, sensing trouble without being shown it, and he'd be more than happy to live with the consequences – however physical – of his own decisions. Acquiring shipboard enemies would be a fact of his professional life, something that went with the turf. In fact a Joss without enemies, said Alex, wasn't worth the rank.

I made a note. A name popped into my head. Dave. Dave Beattie.

“What about the night Warren disappears? Is Dave Beattie the guy who co-ordinates the search?”

“Yeah. Probably. You'd better get advice on that one. Talk to the Naval Provost's Office.”

Next day I made another call. The Naval Provost, basically the RN's police force, operated from premises on Whale Island, a naval establishment nestling in the muddy armpit beside the Commercial Ferry Port. The go-to guy was a Lieutenant-Commander called Tony West. He invited me along.

Once again I explained the plot. Tony, known as “Banjo”, loved it. By this time I was beginning to suspect that a wild imagination is somehow wired into every serving seaman whether an officer or otherwise. Charles Wylie had it. Alex had it. And now Banjo.

The first clue to Warren's disappearance, he said, would have been an empty bunk. A search of the heads (aka lavatories) would have drawn a blank. The Officer of the Watch would then order a search of the entire ship, known as Operation *Thimblehunt*. Once again, no joy. At this point, said Banjo, the supposition has to be that the lad's gone overboard. The Captain would put the ship into a specialised search pattern, depending on tide and wind. Given the

time of year – winter – and the fact that no life jackets were missing, Warren was probably already a gonner. After six hours or so, the search would be called-off, leaving the Joss to auction his possessions and gather as much evidence as possible from Warren's shipmates.

Was the lad depressed? Was he missing his mum? His girlfriend? Had he just had a Dear John? Were there any half-finished blueys (letters home) around? Something that might shed light on what he'd done? Was he frightened by the prospect of going to war? Had he picked up too many dits (stories) from the officers in the Wardroom? Was he scared shitless about getting killed by an Argie Exocet? The heat-seeking missile that always made a beeline for the galley and the mess?

These were all valid questions but if the Joss was that sharp, that alert to every nuance of shipboard life, why wouldn't he be thinking hard about Coughlin?

"Good question," Banjo was looking hard at my notebook. "This ship's going to war, right?"

"Right."

"A week or so later, it's sunk...yeah?"

"Yeah."

"Loads of blokes dead?"

"Yeah."

"Burned? Maimed.? Wounded?"

"Yeah."

"And now you're asking about an 18 year old who doesn't even make it down there?" He shrugged. "End of."

In the days that followed, I slowly filled up the gaps in my research. Phone calls to Type 21 veterans up and down the country identified the Air Filtration Unit and the Air Treatment Unit as two more possible locations for shipboard trysts. Both were unlocked. Ditto the tiller flat which was bloody noisy but totally accessible. Charles Wylie, bless him, explained the rescue search patterns ordered by the Captain and the mysteries of something called the Williamson Turn. I



paid a visit to the Naval Home Club down by the Victory Gate and talked through the kind of annual get-together the survivors of *Accolade's* sinking would attend. This event was to play an important part in the developing narrative and I needed menus, seating plans, plus a map showing the locations of all internal and external CCTV cameras.

By now, the Joss had become the key to the entire plot. Alex had planted the seeds from which Dave Beattie had grown, and what I loved about this man was the way he'd fit so comfortably with Joe Faraday. This was another loner who – once out of the Navy – would find somewhere private and solitary to spend the rest of his working life.

Lin and I had good friends, Alastair and Alison, who had a cottage deep in Devon's Tamar Valley. We'd been down there with them on a couple of occasions and the more I thought about my Joss, the more I knew that Ezentide Cottage offered him the perfect location. The Tamar Valley lies within striking distance of Plymouth. Dave would have discovered it in his service days. The cottage itself overlooked the muddy swirl of the river. It was surrounded by trees. Plus there were birds everywhere – exactly the kind of busy silence that Faraday would adore.

*The cottage came as a surprise, appearing suddenly as the path veered to the left: slate roof, newly whitewashed elevations, tiny recessed windows. The garden in front of the cottage stretched down to the water's edge, a patchwork of carefully-cropped lawn, shrub-filled borders and – beyond a timber summerhouse – a sizeable veggie patch.*

*Faraday shook his head, overwhelmed by the isolation, the peace, that this man had created for himself. The cottage was overhung on three sides by trees, yet facing south the front of the property was flooded with sunshine. Beyond the slow, green drift of the river, more trees. Could life get better than this?*

*It could.*

*On the far side of the cottage, Faraday found half a dozen*

*chickens in a coop, counted four fresh eggs tucked carefully into a bucket lined with straw, caught the scent of freshly-sawn timber from a pile of newly-stacked logs beside the back door, knelt to tickle the chin of a pink-nosed tabby, sprawled in the sunshine. In another life, unshackled from the Pompey underworld, Faraday would kill for a place like this.*

After three books of unrelenting urban gloom I had the feeling that readers might appreciate an interlude like this but I drove down there myself for one last look before making the final decision. If Dave Beattie was to have made his home here, I also needed to find something plausible for the guy to do for a living. By now Alastair had sold the cottage. The approach road grew steadily more narrow until there was barely room for a single vehicle. At the gate to the property I found a battered old Land-Rover. Hand-stencilled on the door was a clue to the new owner. *Tony Weedon*, it read. *Tree-Surgeon*. Tree-Surgeon? Perfect.

Back in Pompey, I had one more research box to tick. HMS *Phoenix* houses the RN's fire-fighting school. I phoned them up and asked if I could come over. I explained about the book. The voice at the other end asked me what, specifically, I was after and I said that I needed to understand exactly what it felt like to be bombed.

"No problem," the voice said. "Tomorrow? Nine o'clock?"

The following day, I found myself watching a bunch of new recruits on a damage limitation exercise. Alarms were wailing and the emergency lighting threw surreal shadows over the rising water while the guys in the fire-fighting suits did their best to wedge timber into a gaping hole. That morning I learned about ruptures in the fire main and the kind of lateral whip that ripples through a ship after a direct hit from a bomb. I made notes about blast routes and the killer potential of the thickly toxic smoke that comes from burning cable runs. Above all, from guys who themselves had survived something similar, I managed to script the book's opening pages.

*SAN CARLOS WATER, 21 MAY, 1982*

*All the training, all the waiting, all the unvoiced speculation: what it*

might feel like, how you might cope. And now, all too suddenly, this.

The first bomb fell aft. His face an inch from the mess deck plates, he could feel the ship lift, shudder, and then settle again. Helo deck, he thought. He'd been out there only hours ago, marshalling Lynx ops in the bright, cold winter sunshine. Now, in the neo-lit harshness of the Delta Two mess, he raised his head a little, adjusting his anti-flash hood, trying to picture the scene above.

"Second aircraft. Red two zero." The PWO's voice on the main broadcast Tannoy.

The Argie Skyhawks normally came in pairs. Concentrating on a single ship was favourite because it narrowed the odds on a sinking. Nice one.

"Brace! Brace! Brace!"

The ship heeled savagely as the Captain tried to throw the Argie pilot's aim. Then came the fairground boom-boom-boom of the 20mm Oerliken and a sudden whoosh as a Seacat engaged. Even with target lock at three miles, Seacats were famously crap. Loosing one at six hundred metres, you'd give its little electronic brain a seizure. Even the PWO admitted it.

The sudden roar of the Skyhawk overhead ground his face into the deck. He shut his eyes and began to count but he hadn't got past one before the mess erupted around him. Thrown upwards by the blast, he had a moment of absolute clarity before the world closed in around him. Small things. The long-overdue bluey he'd started this morning, finished except for a couple of lines at the end. The bet he'd taken a couple of days back with the XO, the date they'd all be home again. And the boy Warren, adrift in the South Atlantic, so much gash.

Smoke everywhere. And the roar of water blasting out of a ruptured main. Voices yelling and the clang of metal on metal as men took a Samson Bar to the heavy secured doors. All that plus a licking flame from the yawning gap below.

For a second or two, pure instinct, he checked himself over. His ears were still ringing from the explosion and when his hand came down from his face it was sticky with blood but he could get up, no problem, and his mind was clear enough to latch itself onto the

emergency drills.

According to the book, he was to return to the flight deck to assess the situation. His instincts, though, told him that the ship was finished. Already, she'd taken a heavy list. Port? Starboard? He couldn't work it out but the smoke was getting thicker by the second and judging by the thunder below the fire was spreading towards the Seacat magazine. A situation like this, any sailor with half a brain would be binning the Damage Control Manual and thinking about an orderly evacuation.

On his hands and knees, hunting for clean air, he began to move. Already the deck plates were uncomfortably hot and the upward blast of the fire below drove him to the edges of what remained of the Two Delta mess. Seconds earlier, he dimly remembered three other guys with him in this cramped little space. Where were they now?

He found one of them sprawled beside a yawning locker. Surrounded by packets of crisps, bits and pieces of civvy kit, plus assorted copies of "Mayfair", the man was rigid with shock but still alive. He slapped his face hard, hauled him into a half-crouch, and pushed him towards the jagged hole where the door had once been. A final shove took the man through.

"Out!" he shouted. "Get out!"

Back inside the mess, the smoke coiled into his lungs. It had a foul, greasy, chemical taste. He could feel his throat burning, his airways beginning to tighten. This is how you die, he thought. This is what the Fire School instructors at Matapan Road meant by suffocation.

He found the next body beside the fridge. Jones. Definitely. He tried for a pulse, spared a breath or two for mouth-to-mouth, all he could muster, then gave up. Taff was very dead.

Two down. One to go.

There was a movement in the half-darkness. Someone staggering uncertainly to his feet, shocked but still mobile. He moved towards the man, meaning to help him out, then stopped. Away to his left, beyond a gaping hole in the forward bulkhead, he could just make out the shape of another body.

*He ducked low again, sucking in the last of the good air, picking his way through the debris. The casualty was face up. His anti-flash gloves were charred where he'd tried to protect himself, and one of his legs was bent outwards at a strange angle, but his eyes were open and he blinked in response to an upraised thumb. Yes, I'm still alive. And yes, for Christ's sake get me out of here.*

*The body weighed a ton. Every time he tried to heave the deadweight towards the mess, towards the passageway and the ladder beyond, the man screamed in agony. Getting him through the tangle of debris would be a joke unless he could find another pair of hands.*

*The guy he'd glimpsed earlier was still in the mess. He could see his bulk, pressed back against the surviving partition. He had his hands out, trying desperately to follow the billowing smoke, up towards the chill sweetness of the open air.*

*"Hey you!" he managed. "Come here! Give us a hand!"*

*The man turned and stared at him. From the main broadcast, faint along the passageway, came a shouted order, repeated twice. The Captain's voice. Abandon ship.*

*The figure beside the partition was on the move again, faster this time, lunging towards the passageway. Feeling a hand on his shoulder, he spun round. The eyes were wide, letter-boxed in the anti-flash hood, staring at this sudden apparition.*

*"There's a guy back there. Give us a hand." It wasn't a polite request. It was an order.*

*The man stared at him for a moment, then shaped to take a swing.*

*"You're fucking joking," he snarled. "Piss off, will you?"*

I now realise that this single scene contained all the clues that any reader would need to successfully weather the next 338 pages. It contains the two key characters, and the violence unleashed by the Argie bomb puts them both to the test. The plot that follows does something similar but at far greater length, and by the time I'd got to the final page I sensed that I might have touched an important nerve in the collective memory that badges a city like Pompey. This was a

community that hugged its past. A succession of foreign wars had culled generation after generation of young men and although Bunny Warren's story was only twenty years old, there was something ageless in the emptiness he left behind.

I sent the completed first draft to Simon, my editor. We both knew that *Angels Passing* had set the series bar significantly higher. The reviews for the so-called break-out book had been fabulous. Susanna Yagar, at the *Sunday Telegraph*, had become a big fan, and Margaret Cannon, from the Toronto *Globe and Mail*, talked of "a brilliantly layered and nuanced story". But the best review of all came from crime-czar Maxim Jakubowski at the *Guardian*. This is what he wrote.

"An ambitious police procedural epic set in the author's home town of Portsmouth, this could well be the book that drags Graham Hurley into the rarified atmosphere of crime bestsellerdom in the wake of Ian Rankin and Val McDermid. The often sordid life of a large British city is caught with pinpoint accuracy, together with a host of realistic characters on both sides of the law. The picture of a society in freefall, littered with wrecked families, drugs and corruption feels painfully true to life and the conflicts facing the investigating policemen betray true emotion and pathos. Hurley was previously a TV documentary maker and his touch stays assured and analytical throughout. A splendid achievement."

On a reading like this, *Angels Passing* was going to be a very hard act to follow but Simon, thank God, had no reservations about Book Four. His line notes were minimal. Overall, he loved the sharpness of the focus and the tightness of the plot. The only challenge we hadn't fully met was the title. I quite fancied *Adrift*. He wasn't convinced. We traded ideas for a day or so, then came the moment when he was browsing a book called *Jackspeak*, a guide to naval slang. He'd found a word that described the hinged metal flap that can be lowered and clamped over a scuttle in order to darken ship. Darkening ship, burying evidence, drawing a discreet veil over a long-ago death was exactly what the book was about. So what was the word?

"Deadlight."

I could hear the quiet excitement in Simon's voice. He was right. It was perfect.

### *Six*

2003 was the year of the Iraq War, the moment when Bush and Blair conned their respective nations into a lightning risk-free campaign that was to set the Iraqis free and light a torch for democracy across the Middle East. It wouldn't quite work out that way, as two million of us tried to point out on an icy Saturday afternoon in central London, but neither Bush nor Blair was listening. That march, and all the other demos that followed, were to feature in some small way in the next book but for the time being I had another pre-occupation. Bazza Mackenzie.

Mackenzie had already appeared in the margins of *Angels Passing* and *Deadlight*, partly because he controlled the Pompey cocaine trade, and partly because of his high-profile mistress, Misty

Gallagher. Bazza had prospered from the huge mark-ups that came from dealing in the laughing powder, and had so far been my response to a growing realisation that a lot of Pompey crime was rooted in the drugs biz. In *Deadlight*, it was Bazza who ordered the savage punishment beating of a young Somerstown scrote called Darren Geech and at the time this brief flicker of ultra-violence seemed totally in keeping with what I knew of the darker side of Pompey. The real-life Bazzas, I was told, were tribal in their loyalty to each other. They ran the tightest of ships, scored oodles of moolah, and were rapidly turning themselves into a full-scale business empire.

By now, my relationship with Andy Harrington and John Ashworth had deepened. They liked what I was doing with the books and they enjoyed the evenings we got together over a curry and a pint or two. And as it turned out, they both shared a determination to give the real-life Bazza's tree a bit of a shake.

For Andy in particular, this mission was starting to look like a crusade. His sharp-end experience with these guys extended way back, deep into the eighties, when Bazza and his mates had been hard-core members of the 6.57, a bunch of football hooligans who exported serious violence to the four corners of the kingdom on weekends when Pompey were playing away. Outings to Birmingham, Millwall, West Ham and Bristol City, he said, had offered reliable opportunities for a decent ruck but had also wised them up to something else. With the rave culture at full throttle, the appetite for ecstasy and a number of other party drugs was enormous. Bazza could score industrial quantities of this stuff through informal networks of fellow hooligans. With the market expanding at the speed of light, there was serious money to be made.

Andy had a mate, a fellow detective called Norman Feerick. On a dark night, Norman could easily pass for Paul Winter – portly, balding, suede car coat, gallons of after-shave – and in a moment of cheerful despair he once told me the secret that lay behind the latest generation of top Pompey faces. “We’re not particularly good at three-card tricks...” he said, “...but these guys were brought up on them. To them, scams are second nature. At school, they’d nick other kids’



lunches, save their own dinner money, buy or steal a five quid tin of biscuits, then flog it for a tenner. Believe me, there's a whole lifetime in those sums. And that's all it is. Just arithmetic."

And so it was. When the all-night rave scene began to falter, Bazza and his mates moved smoothly on to cocaine. The arithmetic, as Norman put it, was compelling. Bazza could source top-quality Peruvian flake, 95% pure, from Aruba (in the Dutch Antilles) for £1,500. Exactly the same money - £1,500 - would buy a Pompey courier, often ex 6.57, to bring the toot back across the Atlantic. The flights were routed via Schipol (Amsterdam), and the coke-laden luggage was ticketed through to Heathrow where baggage handlers on the Bazza payroll knew exactly what to look for. Safely arrived in Pompey, the cocaine was cut with various substances and then distributed to wholesalers across the city (and beyond) who'd be happy to pay £25,000 a kilo. By the time the toot reached the street, said Andy, the city's 3,500 regular users were paying the equivalent of £80,000 per kilo. The mark-ups were breathtaking. As a retail model, it put John Lewis in the shade. Bazza and his mates were rapidly becoming extremely rich.

Over several evenings, Andy gave me an extended seminar on what happened next and it was at this point that I began to pick up the faintest scent of a serious obsession. What drove Andy was anger. He knew these guys personally. Over the years he'd nicked some of them for petty offences, mostly involving drink and violence. He'd watched them ride the drugs wave out of the Eighties and he'd known exactly where all that Pompey-style free enterprise would take them. The city, in his view, was perfect for the likes of Bazza: busy, tribal, inward-looking, easy to control. In the shape of the 200 guys who formed the core of the 6.57, he had the makings of a private army, and a booming night-time economy gave him the market of his dreams. That Bazza should find himself looking at shed loads of money was utterly predictable. Yet, in Andy's view, his bosses at Hantspol headquarters had looked on and done nothing.

Why? Andy shrugged. He'd obviously been faced with this question before. It was partly, he said, the curse of the dreaded

Performance Indicators. A serious assault on the drugs supply biz wouldn't feature on the PI stats, and given the huge resources potentially involved it was easier to chuck Bazza and his mates into the "too-difficult" basket. The other problem was legislation. Between them, the Drugs Trafficking Act (DTA) and the Criminal Justice Act (CJA) offered ample opportunities to attack the upper echelons of the supply network. A new piece of law, the Proceeds of Crime Act (POCA), was about to be enacted, embodying elements of the DTA and the CJA. Andy had studied it in detail. Properly used, he was certain it could attack the likes of Bazza where it really hurt, in his pocket, yet the suits at headquarters still didn't seem that interested. "They think it's all too complicated," Andy said. "And you know what? It isn't."

Our conversations continued over the days that followed. We'd meet in a pub called The Pembroke in Old Portsmouth. They did a fine midday roast and Andy especially admired their take on mashed swede. Tucked up at a corner table with a fine view of the fish tank, he'd analyse the way the local supply networks operated, and where Bazza would be at his most vulnerable. Some of this stuff I'd already picked up from conversations with a D/S from the Hantspol Financial Investigation Unit, but Andy added detail to the flow chart which made it all the tastier. He was far too canny to give me names, or confirm or deny whatever current hunch I was trying to push, but using other non-police contacts it wasn't hard to work out who were the guys running the narcotics scene in the local area. These were people I knew through mates, or mates of mates. They had addresses, families, kids. They'd been around for yonks and some still turned out for a canter in the Sunday morning football leagues. Pompey really was that small.

Bazza's biggest challenge, said Andy, was the money. Cocaine generated huge profits and somehow he had to wash all that money and turn it into legitimate income that would satisfy the tax man. The classic model, adopted world-wide, called for a three stage process: first "placement", then "layering", then "integration". Because I didn't have a degree in Business Studies this was a bit beyond me but in

essence it seemed to boil down to the wash/spin/dry cycle. Andy nodded. Dead right.

“You’re Bazza, OK? You’ve got piles of dosh everywhere. You’ve got more than you can possibly cope with. So you start to invest it. You start buying properties through dodgy solicitors. You bung millions through their client accounts and some finds its way into mortgages, or goes to various nominees, or whatever. You end up owning whole streets of houses so you fill them full of benefit-claimants and asylum seekers and all sorts and then you start investing in businesses. You buy a failing a café-bar. You tart the place up, give it some fancy theme, have a big opening, do the biz. Then you get interested in tanning salons, or pubs, or a big fat stake in some taxi firm, or an estate agency, or a care home, or property overseas, or even a hotel. Anything that will generate legit profits. Anything that will put you at arm’s length from the laughing powder.”

I knew some of these places. I’d drunk in these pubs, eaten in these restaurants, gazed at properties in the estate agent’s window, taken a taxi or two from the firm that was allegedly half Bazza’s. In every case, the experience had been fine and when it came to the hotel, the place was a huge improvement on what had come before. Were all these makeovers down to Class A narcotics? If so, then Pompey’s top face had become a one-man regeneration agency: the guy who could do you a nice urban refurb without any of the paperwork.

Andy laughed. He’d never heard it quite put that way before but in essence, I was right. A lot of the good stuff that was happening on my doorstep was down to the laughing powder.

This, of course, raises a problem or two. Take Bazza off the plot, and what happens to all that recycled dosh? This was a question that struck Andy as deeply ironic but the irony didn’t end there. For months, from other CID contacts, I’d been picking up rumours of a turf-grab by visiting Scouse dealers, determined to pitch camp in Pompey and help themselves to a big fat slice of Bazza’s profits. These were guys who were happy to enforce a debt or settle an argument with a jugful of boiling water laced with sugar, or the flat part

of a hot iron. The Men in Blue had done their best to disrupt the Scousers and run them out of town but in the end – according to the accounts I'd heard – it was Bazza who'd sorted them out. Their lack of manners had offended him. His business model had no room for interlopers. These two-bob Irish tossers were trespassing. End of.

Was this true? And if it was, shouldn't we all be grateful for Bazza keeping the peace? Andy thought that was funny, as well as true, but from where he was sitting there was something infinitely more important than flash café-bars or low-life turf wars. "Think youth", he said. "This city's full of young kids who see the likes of Bazza, see what he's driving, clock that big flash motor cruiser of his, all the other toys. They want some of that. They admire the guy. He's become a sort of role model, a kind of hero-figure. Is that what we really want? At this rate, the guy's gonna end up Lord fucking Mayor."

Great idea. I made a note. Andy and I settled up for the curry and agreed to continue the conversation later. A lawyer was coming down from London to address the troops about the investigative potential of the imminent Proceeds of Crime Act. I was welcome to come along and listen.

A lot of the POCA lecture, to be frank, went over my head but the following week, I met John Ashworth in his office for a catch-up. He was nursing a boxful of Kleenex and had a streaming cold. John, I suspected, was developing some kind of long-term operation against the Pompey supply networks, probably in collaboration with Andy, though neither of them would confirm it. By now I'd trawled through the rest of my notes, a record of dozens of related conversations, and thought I could put together the bones of an operation for myself.

John was braced for yet more questions.

"You're thinking court from the off, am I right?"

"Obviously."

"Fraud is where the dirty money hits the system. That's your point of entry. That's where you go in."

"No comment."

"You keep it tight. Really tight. Handful of blokes. No more."

"No comment."

"You operate from secured premises. Somewhere seriously off-piste."

"No comment."

"You select a specific target and never give up."

"No comment."

"You use the legislation. You want to bankrupt this guy."

"No comment."

"So you select a specific transaction, evidence where the money came from, establish that everything downstream, every penny of income, is tainted – then let the confiscation procedures kick in."

"No comment."

"And maybe you do something else. Hook the guy. Tempt him. Play on his vanity. Stitch him up."

"Some kind of sting you mean?" John reached for another Kleenex. "No comment."

We studied each other for a long moment. Then John got to his feet and looked out of the window. He always kept his voice low. Especially on occasions like this.

"What you've got to remember is that these guys are *really* tight with each other," he murmured. "They've been mates forever. They're all Pompey. They've played football together, they've fought rival fans together, they've shared flats, girlfriends, the lot. So unless you're Pompey too, you'll never get anywhere near them. That's why there aren't any real informants to speak of. And that's why these guys know no fear."

*Know no fear.* Bazza was starting to sound like a grown-up version of Doodie. This sounded deeply promising but John hadn't finished.

"You know something else? This city is totally corrupt. The money goes everywhere. It taints everything. You wouldn't believe it. And with the money goes Bazza. Think football. Think politicians. Solicitors. Accountants. Developers. Planners. Suppliers. Crown Court. Magistrates Court. Everywhere. You have to be so bloody careful who you're talking to and you know why? Because so many of these people know the guy, because it all goes straight back to Bazza. It's that kind of city. *Really* tight."

I nodded. I'd heard exactly the same from Andy only days ago. "Even us..." he said. "...even within the police. The man has ears everywhere."

There are moments in the kind of stories I write when you can hear the pieces slipping into place. This was one of them. I reached for my pad.

By late spring, with George Bush proclaiming victory in Iraq, I was pretty confident I'd got Bazza taped. This guy would be an amalgam of all the research I'd so carefully culled from my contacts in and out of the police. He'd be Pompey born and bred. He'd be mad about football. He'd be small, shrewd, volatile, and deeply cunning. He'd love a fight ("foyte") and have no time for losers. He'd be nerveless in situations that would scare most of us shitless and he'd have acquired a lifelong partner in the shape of Marie, a beautiful High School rebel from the other side of the tracks.

My Bazza would have been one of the 6.57 who set out to plunder shopping malls and wreck café bars all over Europe. He'd have a taste for sharp suits, expensive motor cars, and extreme violence. At the same time, he'd be shrewd enough to employ exactly the right kind of white collar advice – solicitors, accountants – to keep the Men in Blue at arm's length. By the opening of Book Five, he'd be living in a five bed-roomed spread in an area of Southsea called Craneswater. Craneswater is the closest Pompey comes to posh.

So far so good. But to make the plot work I had to find a chink in Bazza's armour, a weakness that would offer the Andy Harringtons and John Ashworths of this world just a glimmer of hope that they might be able to put him away. Given the guy I'd created, that weakness had to be vanity, or maybe vaulting ambition. Bazza thinks of himself as Mr Pompey. If the city belongs to anyone it belongs to him. In the small hours, with Marie asleep beside him, he'll be dreaming of the big one, the huge fuck-off gesture, the big splashy purchase that will confirm his place at the very top of the Pompey heap. I'd started off by creating the Prince of the City. What I needed now was a coronation.

For a day or two I thought of one of the big seafront hotels. Then I found myself toying with Bazza making a bid for South Parade Pier. He could install a casino, perfect for the washing of yet more money. He could tart the place up and hold regular boxing evenings, occasions with a bit of class, a rich Pompey mix of money, booze and lashings of violence. I floated the idea past Andy Harrington who pointed out that evenings like these were already a fact of life, attracting an interesting mix of police officers, freemasons, and top faces from the Pompey underworld. I thanked him for the intel and struck the Pier off my Bazza wish-list. I could upgrade the boxing to cage-fighting but there was already a staleness to the idea. Bazza, my Bazza, followed in no one's footsteps but his own.

Then, on a long morning run along the seafront, I found myself looking seaward at the closest of the three forts out in the Solent. These had been built in the nineteenth century to provide interlocking fire in the event of an attack on the naval dockyard by the French. There were more fortifications to the north of the city, cut deep into the crest of Portsdown Hill, and the ring of fire extended to the west on the Gosport side of the harbour. Whatever plans Napoleon III might have for Pompey, the city would remain beyond reach. This struck me as a serviceable metaphor for Bazza himself, the Pompey villain who'd made himself impregnable, and the plot implications were only too tempting. What if Spitbank Fort was up for sale? What if Bazza decided to put a bid in? And what if he was silly enough to pay for it with unwashed – or semi-washed – drugs money?

The more I thought about the idea, the better I liked it. It had a lot of Bazza's trademark boldness. It was the kind of stunt – highly public, impossible to ignore – that he'd adore. Plus an offshore casino would give him the perfect excuse for a succession of wild parties. I started thinking about a helipad, five star accommodations, fine dining, fashion shows and photo-shoots for the glitterati down from London. If Mr Pompey wanted to put himself and his city on the map, then here was his chance.

Faraday's job, of course, would be to cast the bait and manipulate the sale in such a way that Bazza ended up taking a risk too far and

landing himself well and truly in the shit. This would require a great deal of guile and patience on Faraday's part, and on the part of the senior officer bossing the sting. I had a shrewd idea that Andy and John were up to something faintly similar but faced with a total lack of corroboration it was down to me to invent the whole thing. Writers adore a challenge like this. What other job in life pays you to fib for a living?

Within a week, I'd designed the outlines of Operation *Tumbriel*. Faraday joins the investigation late, replacing D/I Nick Hayden, who's been run over by a bunch of lairy Scouse drug dealers. A call to Tony West, aka Banjo, had won me a tour of RN premises on Whale Island, which turned out to be perfect for *Tumbriel*. And thus Faraday finds himself leading a covert operation, involving a mere handful of specialist officers, about which no one else in the force has a clue.

With the broad thrust of the story now established I needed to thicken the plot, inventing sub-plot after sub-plot to give the book texture and richness. You might think of this process as adding a kind of gravy, a mix of character and incident that will bring out the essence of the story, and the obvious place to start was at the consumer end of the drugs chain.

All writers, in my experience, are squirrels. No memory, no event, no set of circumstances, no conversation ever goes to waste. They're all stored on hopelessly overloaded shelves in your brain and may – one day – pop up in a book.

In the early seventies, as I briefly mentioned earlier, I'd made a documentary about a bunch of young heroin addicts in the city. I and some friends had raised enough money to pay for the film stock but little else. Two days' filming had given us some startling footage and the addicts themselves had been a revelation. The film was to have no commentary, no list of do's and don'ts, just candid first-person accounts from the guys (and women) who'd got into serious trouble with smack.

It worked a treat. The cut version, titled *Better Dead?*, included a post-mortem, graphically shot, and some fixing sequences which were truly horrible. With the budget nearly exhausted we had just



enough money to hire a London venue for the press preview. Half way through the film a guy made a bolt for the exit door but fainted in the aisle. Ian Dillow, an ex-journalist who was part of our team, had the house lights turned on. This was a stroke of genius because next day's national papers were brimming with news of the movie that had felled a hard-boiled journalist. This, said a leader in the *Daily Mail*, was footage no child should ever see. Within weeks, we were selling 16mm film copies (at £90 each) to schools nationwide. The orders multiplied and our little charity – Project Icarus – went on to make a dozen more movies.

Somehow, I was determined to weave elements of this story into the ever-growing tapestry that would become Book Five. The drug involved, heroin, was very different to cocaine but if I was nimble I might be able to turn this contrast to the book's advantage. Another important theme I had to address was Faraday's love life and instinctively I sensed the possibility of somehow using one element – the making of a drugs movie – into sharpening the developing drama around Faraday's choice of partners.

From the moment I'd started thinking in earnest about Joe Faraday, I'd figured that his love life would become central to the series. This, remember, is a guy who's devoted most of his spare time to bringing up his deaf-mute son. By the opening of *Turnstone*, J-J has decamped to France leaving Faraday to at last invest a little time in his private life. After the long-ago death of his wife, Janna, he's had very little to do with women. As a direct result, the choices he now makes are far from wise.

Ruth Potterne, in *Turnstone*, is mid forties, slender-legged, large-breasted, and has beautiful hands. She favours Arab and Indian silver jewelry and long cotton dresses, and runs her late husband's art gallery in Southsea's Marmion Road. Self-aware and slightly opaque, she slips easily into Faraday's bed but leaves him profoundly perplexed.

*Once, in an unguarded moment, Faraday had described Ruth as every detective's wet dream. Far from taking offence, she'd asked him to explain and as he fumbled his way towards some kind of*

*rationale he'd realised exactly what it was that fuelled this strange compulsion of his to keep chasing her. Everyone, he said, was a series of dots. Connect the dots in the right order and the person was revealed. It happened time and again in his professional life - with colleagues, with witnesses, with suspects. It had happened, over the course of a single rain-lashed afternoon in Seattle, with Janna. It had happened, over twenty long years, with his son, J-J. But never with Ruth. She was every detective's wet dream because her case was so obviously worth cracking. Yet the harder he tried, the more aware he became of his own inadequacies. She was, in her own phrase, beyond reach.*

After Ruth came Marta. Faraday met her at the weekly French conversation classes he attended. Marta had a high-powered job at IBM. She drove a new Alfa-Romeo. She was stylish and lightly flirtatious. She taught him how to laugh, how to relax, and she bedded him with immense panache. Faraday, besotted, neglected to find out about her personal circumstances. Later, much to Paul Winter's amusement, he discovered that she was married.

*Winter had long had Faraday down as a loser when it came to women. Twenty years bringing up a deaf son had obviously cramped his social style and office gossip suggested that a brief affair with the widow of a local art dealer had quickly hit the buffers, but with the boy at last off his hands, Faraday seemed to be making up for lost time.*

*In one sense, Winter wished him nothing but good luck. In his own experience, affairs with married women offered the perfect fusion of theft plus brilliant sex. Once you'd blagged it off a women who was dying for the odd variation or two, you knew there was nothing better. But the thought of Faraday doing it with someone else's wife sat oddly with everything else he knew about the man. When it came to the job, Faraday could be a nightmare. Winter had never met anyone else who was so straight.*

The relationship with Marta finally came to nothing but by the time I was thinking hard about Book Five, another woman had found herself a perch in Faraday's heart. This was Eadie Sykes, a leggy Australian

divorcee with a background in video production. Fit, game, blunt and totally fearless, she stepped into Faraday's life in *Deadlight* after hiring J-J to shoot black and white stills on a Dunkirk anniversary TV docco. J-J, blessed with his mother's eye for a picture, did exceptionally well but for Faraday the rapport he struck up with his new employer was even more important.

*Recently, watching Eadie with J-J, Faraday had concluded that she'd become the mother his son had never had. She'd built a real kinship with the boy. She'd become his mentor, his pathfinder, his guide. She was teaching him all she knew. She stuck by him in difficult situations. And all of that, in Faraday's view, probably added up to motherhood. Janna had died when J-J was barely a couple of months old. Only now, 23 years later, had he discovered a woman he could rely on.*

As a late spring tumbled into summer, the possibilities of the plot for what was to become *Cut to Black* were deepening by the day. What if Bazza, with typical *chutzpah*, took his first step onto the public stage by funding a video version of *Better Dead*? Something to make the kids at last sit up and take notice? What if that money went to one of Pompey's leading video makers, the force of nature that is Eadie Sykes? What if the making of this video, co-organised by J-J, were to put Faraday's son in the lens of a drugs squad surveillance team? And what if the video's key junkie, a pale-faced rich kid called Daniel Kelly, were to die of an overdose after Eadie's camera departs?

Each of these questions triggered a number of intriguing possibilities but what brought the plot to life was the fact that J-J brings his dad and Eadie together in circumstances that can't fail to stretch Faraday to the limit. Already handcuffed to Operation *Tumbril*, about which he's sworn to silence, he will find himself signing on behalf of his son in a CID interview suite while attending detectives – whom he knows – try and nail J-J on a charge of conspiracy to manslaughter. Rich pickings, indeed.

At this stage in the writing cycle comes the gathering-up of

research threads. A uniformed sergeant, Dave Hunter, talked me through the custody centre booking-in procedure that would greet J-J after his arrest. Tim Robinson, at the QA hospital's Department of Critical Care, explained the twelve painful weeks that lay in wait for D/I Nick Hayder after being run over by a bunch of Scouse drug dealers, while an undercover officer – one of John Ashworth's mates - shared a secret or two about u/c deployments, vital to a proper understanding of the workings of Operation *Tumbil*.

Help also arrived from other corners of the city. David Horsley, the Pompey Coroner, took me through the Inquest that would follow the death of Daniel Kelly, while Michelle Jackolow, the owner of Spit Bank Fort, was only too happy to have Lin and I pay a visit. All these separate conversations generated more possibilities to strengthen what already felt like a promising narrative but as the time approached to launch myself into the first draft, my eye fell once again on Bazza Mackenzie.

I'd now spent an entire summer with my idea of this guy. I'd caught his tone of voice. I could visualise the way he walked, I knew what he drank. I could make a pretty informed guess about the million and one things that drove him nuts. And the more he shaped himself in my imagination, the more I realised just how much he shared with Paul Winter. As the series developed this was to have profound consequences for both men but for now I could only anticipate the mid-book scene that I knew awaited them both. Winter is paying Mackenzie a visit at his Craneswater mansion.

*Winter unbuttoned his coat and sank into one of the two armchairs. The last time he'd seen Bazza Mackenzie was a couple of years back at a CID boxing do on South Parade pier. They'd shared a bottle of champagne while two young prospects from Leigh Park belted each other senseless*

*"Lost a bit of weight, Baz. Working out?"*

*"Stress, mate, and too many bloody salads. Marie started going to a health farm last year. Worst three grand I ever spent. You know why she wanted to move here?"*

*"Tell me."*

*"It's at least a mile to the nearest decent chippy. She measured it in the Merc and then phoned me up and told me to put the deposit down. You think it would be the views, wouldn't you? And the beach? And all these posh neighbours? Forget it. We live in a chip-free zone, mush. Welcome to paradise."*

*Winter laughed. Unlike many other detectives he'd always had a sneaking regard for Bazza Mackenzie. The man had a lightness of touch, a wit, an alertness that went some way to explaining his astonishing commercial success. You could see it in his face, in his eyes. He watched you, watched everything, ready with a quip or an offer or a put-down, restless, voracious, easily bored.*

*In the wrong mood, as dozens could testify, this man could be genuinely terrifying. Nothing daunted him, least of all the prospect of serious injury, and Winter had seen photographic evidence of the damage he could do to men twice his size. But catch him in the right mood and you couldn't have a nicer conversation. Bazza, as Winter had recently told Suttle, had a heart the size of a planet. Whatever he did, for whatever reason, he was in there one thousand per cent, total commitment.*

*"What's this, then? New chums?"*

*Winter was inspecting a gaudy collection of colour snaps pinned to a cork wallboard, one image overlapping with the next, briefly-caught moments in the cheerful chaos of Mackenzie's social life. One of the latest photos featured four middle-aged men posing on a putting green. They all looked pleased with themselves but it was Mackenzie who was holding the flag.*

*"Austen Bridger, isn't it?" Winter was peering at a bulky, scarlet-faced figure in slacks and a Pringle sweater.*

*"That's right. Plays off seven. Unbeatable on his day. Look at this though. Here..." Mackenzie dug around in a drawer then produced a scorecard and insisted Winter take a look. "Three birdies and an eagle. Cost him a dinner at Mon Plaisir, that did. Foie Gras, turbot, Chablis, the works. Marie gave me serious grief for weeks after."*

*He retrieved the scorecard and gazed at it while Winter's eyes*

returned to the corkboard. Austen Bridger was a solicitor with a booming out-of-town practise in a new suite of offices in Port Solent. He specialised in property and development deals, high end stuff, and had the executive toys to prove it. Away from the golf course, he sailed a £350,000 racing yacht which regularly featured in the columns of the News. Another winner.

Mackenzie was on his feet now, ash-grey track suit and newish-looking Reeboks. He began to poke through the photos on the cork board, hunting for a particular shot.

"Here, mush." He unpinned it. "Dubai at Christmas. Can't do too much for you out there. Marie loved it. See that ramp thing in the background?"

Winter was looking at a beach shot. Mackenzie and his wife were posed against the brilliant blue of the sea. Marie was an inch or two taller than her husband and for a middle aged woman, bikini-clad, she was in remarkable nick.

"What ramp thing?"

"There. Look." Mackenzie tapped the photograph. "It's for water skiing. Day one you get to stand up. Day two you go tearing round the bay. Day three they tell you about jumping and ramps and stuff and day four you get to cack yourself. You ever done it?"

"Never."

"Brilliant. Some blokes do it backwards. Can you believe that? Can't wait, mate. Still on the Scotch, are you?"

Without waiting for an answer he went across to a filing cabinet and produced a bottle of Glenfiddich from the top drawer. A glass came from a table in the corner. It was up to Winter to pour.

"And you?" Winter was looking at the single glass.

"Not for me."

"Why not?"

"Given up, mush."

"You're serious?"

"Yeah, just for now. I'm nosey, if you want the truth. I've spent so much time pissed, all this is a bit of a novelty." He waved a hand around, a gesture that seemed to have no geographical limit, then he

settled back behind the desk, a man with important news to impart. "You know something about this city? Something really weird? It's about the way you look at it. As a nipper you just do your own thing, head down, get on with it. A little bit older, you follow your dick. A bit older still, you get married, all that stuff. But you know your place, right? Because everything's bigger than you are. Then, if you're lucky, you wake up one morning and there it is, there for the taking."

"What?"

"The city. Pompey. And you know why? Because this place is tiny. Get to know maybe a coupla dozen guys, the right coupla dozen, and there's nothing you can't do. We're not talking bent. We're just talking deals, one bloke to another. And you know something else? It's easy, easier than you can ever believe. Suss how it's done, make the right friends, and you start wondering why every other bastard isn't doing it too."

"So what does that make you?"

"Lucky, mush." He reached for a paperclip and began to unbend it as he elaborated on this new world of limitless opportunities. How one deal led to another. How business could breed some genuine friendships. How wrong he'd been about some of the middle-class blokes he'd always had down as wankers. Fact was, a lot of them were hard bastards, knew how to live with risk, knew how to party. Collars and ties, in the end, were nothing but camouflage.

"Know what I mean?"

Winter nodded, his eyes returning to the corkboard. Then he took a long swallow of Glenfiddich, the drift of this sudden outburst of Mackenzie's slowly slipping into focus. The city, he was saying, had become his plaything, the train set of his dreams. He could alter the layout, mess with the signalling, change the points, play God.

A smile warmed Winter's face. Bazza Mackenzie, he thought. The Bent Controller.

## Seven

Books come from strange places. It was March, 2004. *Cut to Black* had been edited and was ready for the printers. I was at home in Southsea, killing a wet afternoon with an overdue trawl through the weekend papers. An article about Sarajevo caught my eye, an account of the long years of siege when Serb gunners in the surrounding mountains did their best to bring the city to its knees. This was a world of plastic sheeting for blown-out windows, of old men taking axes to wooden pallets for winter fuel, of veggie patches growing everywhere, of sagging electricity lines, of women risking their lives for half a loaf of stale bread, and of the incessant boom of heavy artillery as shell after shell chased them across the ruined city.

Towards the end of the article, a woman recalled the morning her sister died. Hours after her remains had been tidied into a body bag and taken away, a truck full of UN troops arrived. "There were ten of them," she said. "They wore those blue helmets, like always, and they got down off the truck and started measuring the shell hole. I went across to them. I was still in shock. Where were they when it mattered? Where were they when Jasna died?"

That scene was all too easy to imagine. This was a woman who was tired of history, sick of the countless feuding tribes that so often turned the Balkans into a blood bath. She probably expected very little of life – somewhere safe to live, somewhere to bring up a family – yet here she was, watching a bunch of so-called peacekeepers turning her sister's death into a hastily scribbled description of the scene of crime.

The anger and incomprehension sparked by the article sent me to Pompey's Central Library. Within a week I'd read a couple of books giving me the political background I needed. Then came a handful of



personal accounts from Bosnians, from Western journalists, and from a serving UK army officer who'd done his best to make life just a little more tolerable for the tide of displaced refugees who'd tried to flee the fighting.

The story, in essence, was simpler than I'd thought. During the Cold War, the US had monitored every square inch of the old Yugoslavia in the belief that World War Three might one day start there or thereabouts. Then, after the Berlin Wall came down in 1989, nobody cared. Tito's federation fell apart and the Serbs, always the self-proclaimed victims of history, set about killing as many Bosnians as they could lay hands on. The polite word for this was genocide.

I read deeper into this catastrophe, knowing that somehow it had to provide the tinder for the next book. To date, ever mindful of Malcolm Edward's insistence that D/I Faraday should serve a life sentence in Pompey, I'd concentrated on trying to tease the essence out of this inimitable city. But my research had taught me that – in real life – the Major Crime Team's patch extended far beyond Portsmouth and on my excursions along the seafront I began to eye the Isle of Wight.

I'd already based an entire book there – a stand-alone called *Permissible Limits* – and I knew that the island had become a magnet for asylum seekers and other immigrants. There was plenty of seasonal work during the summer in the island's hotels and holiday camps, plus lots more jobs on offer from gang-masters recruiting labour for work in the fields. Add the care industry – literally hundreds of nursing homes – and you began to understand why the island had become the destination of choice for so many refugees, illegal or otherwise.

The possibility that I could credibly draw some kind of fictional bead on the Bosnian nightmare shaped our plans for the summer. In late June, we took a series of trains south through Europe and then began to backpack down the Adriatic. The final ferry-hop took us to Dubrovnik where we settled down in a local café and watched England surrender a goal lead and finally lose to France in the opening stages of that year's Euro-Championships. The following day, we found a

bus that would take us back up the coast and then inland to Sarajevo.

It was a memorable journey. Leaving the coast behind us, we sped through neat fields of vines and a straggle of half-completed housing estates, a landscape untouched by war. Frequent tunnels offered a brief taste of Bosnian darkness. Then, an hour inland from the coast, we were looking at billows of white cloud streaming off the great grey wall of the Balkans: ageless, craggy, indomitable. Mostar guarded the road to Sarajevo, and the bus eased through the Croatian half of the town, still disfigured by the war. The intervening years had done little to repair the damage to burned-out office and apartment blocks, and it was rare to see a building unpocked by small-arms fire. These were footnotes to a winter's reading, an urban wasteland made familiar by the countless stories that had bled out of that conflict, and as we hit the road to Sarajevo again, plunging deep into the mountains, I began to picture my fictional lead on exactly this journey. He'd have driven up from UK HQ north of Split. He'd be heading inland. And, like me, he'd be carefully filing away his first impressions.

He had a name by now, Rob Pelly. He was going to be an ex-sapper, serving with the Royal Engineers. What he saw during those bitter winter months that followed his arrival in Bosnia would fuel a deep anger that would stay with him through the years to come. This was a man who'd finally shed his uniform and turned his back on the British Army, one of a wave of redundancies announced at the height of the fighting. For a while he'd do what he could, buying an old lorry and driving supplies half away across Europe to the beleaguered settlements around Vitez and Banja Luka. In time, these journeys would come to an end, but not before he'd plucked a woman called Lajla from the chaos of Bosnia, and brought her home to the Isle of Wight.

Sarajevo turned out to exceed my expectations. It was a bigger city than I'd ever imagined, a sprawl of factories, high-rise apartments, and gloomy industrial estates. The sky was grey, the encircling mountains disappearing into the murk. Some of the Serb heavy guns had been dug into Mount Igman, famous from the 1984

Winter Olympics. The bulk of the mountain was much further away than I'd thought, a tribute to the sheer reach of modern artillery. At this point the traffic was backed up behind some obstacle or other and when the coach began to move again we found ourselves behind a donkey and cart. The guy lashing the donkey could have stepped out of the seventeenth century – hollow-faced, unshaven, huge hands, threadbare jacket - though his cart was laden high with treadless rubber tyres.

When we finally got off the bus we looked for an agency to find a room for the night. My Serbo-Croat is crap and we ended up with a ground floor unit in an abandoned shopping precinct. There were two camp beds, no curtains, and bare wires hanging from the walls. A pair of neon tubes shed a hard white light on the cracked tiles underfoot and there was a major problem with the plumbing from the neighbouring loo. We turned the lights off early and spent an uneasy night listening to whispered drug deals in the scary half-darkness beyond the plate glass window. By the time we got up next morning the floor was under an inch of water. So much for the blessings of peace.

Back home, a month or so later, I pondered what to do next. Our trip to Bosnia had fleshed out my idea of Rob Pelly. Nine years after the war's end, he'd be running a nursing home on the Isle of Wight. I knew what he looked like. I could picture the way he handled himself. But for the first time in my authorial career I decided that I had to listen to his voice before I began writing in earnest. This is what he told me.

*Until you've been somewhere like Bosnia you just don't get it about civil war. I've fought in the Falklands and I know what a horrible place the battlefield can be but at least it was black and white there. You had an enemy. He wore a uniform. You were there to slot him. Bosnia? Protecting aid convoys? A sitting target for any passing scumbag? Total nightmare.*

*Worst of all were the refugees. There were thousands of them. The Ruperts called them "Displaced People", or "DPs", and they were everywhere. Drive back to the coast, back to Split, and they'd be on*

the road with their horse and carts and bundles of stuff just shuffling on. When it rained, which seemed pretty much all the time, they'd stop the donkey and sit underneath the cart, whole families of them. Then up in the mountains, depths of fucking winter, every ski lodge you passed was stuffed full of more of them. You could tell because of the washing on the balconies. And another thing – they were mostly women and kids, no men. Why? Because the men had been mullered by the Serbs.

The Serbs could be evil. They were paranoid bastards, too, but the longer you stayed and the harder you looked the more you realised that all of them – Serbs, Croats, Muslims – were off their heads. Some of the stuff you saw was unbelievable. There was this village down the valley from Vitez. It was called Ahmici. This particular week it had all kicked off between the Croats and the Muslims because the ragheads had kidnapped a local Croat commander and so the Croat boys put their heads together and took out the entire village to make a point or two. I kid you not. They shot the place up, mortared the escape routes, put snipers at either end, and then sent the death squads in. Males first. Then male nippers. Then the rest. Fuck, they even shot the heads off a cage full of budgies.

I was in that village a couple of days later, checking for booby traps before the UN suits arrived. There were still bodies everywhere, whole families barbecued because the Croats had torched the houses, and there I was taking a look around the back of this place when I heard a noise, a scrunching noise. You know what it was? Only the family fucking puppy, scrawny little thing. And you know what he was eating? Some poor bastard's arm.

No matter how much weed you lay your hands on, you don't forget stuff like that. That's partly why I decided to bin the Army. The voluntary redundancy thing came along, perfect timing, and I said thank you very much. My CSM thought I'd just had enough, thought it was all down to raghead fatigue, thought I was back off home to put my feet up. Was I fuck. There was still a job to be done in that khazi of a place and me, cocky bastard, just knew I could do it better out of uniform.

The redundancy paid for the truck and people I knew on the Isle of Wight took one look at the little video I'd made and organised all kinds of stuff to take back out. It was summer by then but six months in Vitez had told me that this thing would be kicking off forever. No way would these maniacs ever stop killing each other. And that meant loads of poor bastards – people like my mum and yours – with nowhere to live and nowhere to call home. And so back I went.

Lajla? The girl in the Travnik camp? Of course I remembered her. I didn't know the full story then, hadn't a clue what had really happened to her back in her village, but there was something in her face that told you not to get too close. She was bright, and a bit of a looker too, but none of the normal buttons seemed to work. She didn't laugh much, except with the baby, and looking back I don't blame her. If you were a man, any man, you had a lot to answer for.

To be honest, I was surprised she agreed to come back to the UK. At the time it just seemed to be a neat way of using all that empty space in the truck but over the course of the journey I began to get to know her a bit. She was a lovely girl, still is. To lose your mother and your brother and your whole fucking life to a bunch of thugs? To be pushed into no man's land with nowhere to go? To end up with some dope-crazed ex-sapper, hiding under a pile of cardboard boxes as he guns it through the Green Channel at Pompey Ferry port? Jesus, what a woman.

She and my mum hit it off from the start. Some of the residents, too, especially the loonier ones. The good thing about our place is the space we've got. It was big enough out the back to give her and Fida a little flat of their own, a bit of privacy. After the camp in Travik, Lajla couldn't believe it. There's a nice view out the back – fields and then the arse end of Boniface Down – and she changed the bed around so it pointed at the window. Some afternoons I used to go in there with cakes mum had made and find the pair of them propped up against the pillows while she told the baby some story or other, lots of pointing and laughing and whispering in Fida's ear. They lived in a bubble for years, those two, still do in many ways, and it's my job to make sure no twat comes along and pricks that bubble. That's why dickhead

Steve Morgan deserved what he got. Lajla's a daughter as far as I'm concerned, and whatever else happens you never fuck with her. Yeah?

The other stuff I get up to – bringing people onto the island and sorting them out – is another hangover from the war. Of course there's money in it, bloke's got to make a living, but I'm choosy about the clientele. It's still the Balkans: Bosnia and Kosovo mainly. I've got some awesome contacts out there, ten years in the making, and these people trust me. They save up to send their kids to the UK – mainly young blokes – and they hand them over because they know I'm gonna look after them.

And you know something else? The way this country is going, we're fucking lucky to have them. These are people who are really up for it. They speak a language or two. They understand how shitty life can get. And they're prepared to graft their way out of it. Stuff we take for granted – stuff like law and order and Prem football four times a week – is the dog's bollocks to them. And believe me, they're not just grateful but eager. These kids want to make the best of themselves. Like I say, lucky us.

Of course I find these guys work. If you're in my position, that's what you do. They have to make a living, just like the rest of us, but if you've got me down as some half-arsed gang master you'd be wrong. I run an employment agency. I supply labour. It's all totally legit. Check me out. I even pay tax and VAT. Plus I give these guys somewhere decent to live. You can check that out, too. I'll give you some addresses. Sandown. Shanklin. Ventnor. Puts some of those dossy DSS places to shame, full of skag heads and lowlife. Sure it comes out of my guys' wages but you tell me where else on this island you can get a bed for thirty five quid a week. In any case, what's the alternative? You want them going off to the council and declaring themselves homeless? What would that do to the housing list?

So the way I see it I'm providing a service from both ends. For the farmers on the island who can't get extra labour for love nor money, especially when the supermarkets start screaming for extra fucking lettuce. And for the blokes I bring in as well. Their papers? I sort all

*that out. Who checks them? I do. How come? Because I'm their employer. So maybe, on second thoughts, you might have a bit of respect and call me a businessman. Because that's what I am. It's supply and demand. You want cheap food, I'm the bloke in the middle who makes all that happen. Means and ends, mate. Without people like me, you'd be paying way over the odds.*

*Lately, though, this whole thing's becoming a pain in the arse. The way I see it, the country's going down the khazi. Try Pompey on a Friday night, or Ryde or Shanklin or Newport or any fucking place. The Brits are drinking themselves silly, especially the kids. They think life owes them a living and they're in for one big fucking shock.*

*So the time might be right for a move. I've talked it over with Lajla and she sees no great problem. Be ironic, wouldn't it? Sell up, cash in, then buy a nice little B&B, some place in the Jablanica Valley maybe, up from Mostar, little smallholding, couple of acres, a well in the garden, chickens, sheep, the odd goat, plus decent people who don't throw up all over the fucking pavement then batter each other senseless every night. I could handle that, no kidding I could. These places are cheap as chips, going for a song if you've got the right contacts, and you know what? Johnny Croat can't get enough of all that foreign investment.*

*Could Lajla hack it? Of course she could. Her quarrel was with the Serbs, and I think we've sorted that.*

Having Rob Pelly introduce himself like this did my authorial confidence no end of good. In the preparations for any book there comes a moment when you have to background all the research – in this case mainly reading – and somehow create a character solid, credible and interesting enough to carry the reader in the direction you want him to go. As it happens, Pelly strode onto the page practically uninvited. I'd met people like this before. There were several with his tone of voice in Pompey. But Lajla was going to be equally important and she represented a very different challenge. How many Bosnian women did I know who could tell a story like hers? None. And so I had to shut my eyes, think very hard, and try and fathom the way

she'd explain herself. Lajla, if it helps, is slightly built, with a narrow face, a sallow complexion, wonderful bone structure, and vivid green eyes. To no one's surprise, least of all Pelly's, she's extremely wary.

*The day the soldiers came to our village it was June. The Serbs were everywhere. They took my father and my two brothers – Zihad and Muharem. My father tried to stop them so the soldiers beat him right there in front of the house, in front of my mother, in front of me. Then they put them all in the trucks with the other men from the village, other Muslims. They took them to the local town, to the police station. There they made all the men run between lines of soldiers who beat them with sticks and pieces of garden hose. Inside the police station they set dogs on the men. One of the men was my uncle. He was trying to help my father. They beat my uncle more than anyone else. When they finally got to the camp my brothers had to feed my uncle with a spoon because his face was so broken.*

*The camp was at Omaska. They had a special room at the camp where they beat the men to death, Muslim men. They split their heads open like melons then dumped them in a bath. Every day all the men had to stand outside in the heat. It was very hot that summer, often very near 100 degrees, and they had to stand ten, maybe twelve hours a day. Food was thrown into the room where they all slept. Everyone fought for the food and the Serbs laughed at them. Then the Serbs would throw water in. Muharem says you had to lap water up from the bare floorboards like a dog. When the men got weaker the Serbs would sometimes set fire to tyres, three on a pile, and then make the men jump over them. If you couldn't do it, you burned to death.*

*The special room was called The White Room. In fact it was three rooms with a fire burning outside. If you went to the White Room you knew you would be tortured. They tortured men all night. Those who died were burned on the fire. They tortured my brother Zihad in front of my father. They whipped him with electrical flex, beat him with rifle butts, and then they put a plastic bag over his head. One of the men kicked my brother in the stomach really hard so that Zihad was sick.*



He was trying to breath and sucked in the sick. The sick choked him and he died. My father saw all this and afterwards the Serbs made him take my brother's body outside and burn it on the fire. The Serbs laughed. They said my father was good at tidying up and so they gave him the job full-time, every night, burning more bodies. Always, the Serbs were drunk.

My father and my younger brother, Muharem, survived the camp. After the war they went to Germany. They both live with a Turkish family in Hamburg. Muharem works in a garage. He was always mad about cars. My father does nothing. Muharem says that he doesn't talk much, doesn't go out. Most days he just sits in the room he shares with Muharem and stares at the wall. He says he feels nothing. He says he feels dead. He's maybe a bit crazy, my father.

Muharem is in touch with someone from our village. His name is Dragan. He's a Serb we all went to school with. He was nice. We all liked him. Now he's become a priest and I think he must feel guilty about what happened to Zihad, what happened to all of us. He says that many of the Serb soldiers who fought in the war are still in the village. He says that one of them, a builder, has made lots of money buy fixing up our houses and selling them to other Serbs. They burned all our houses during the war so we could never come back. This man, the builder, has become rich by stealing our land.

What happened to me? When the soldiers came they took me and my mother also. They took the younger woman to the school and then the truck drove on. I never saw my mother again and I don't know what happened to her. At the school we were put in a classroom at the back where the little ones were taught. I knew that classroom well. There were childrens' drawings all over the wall. Through the window you could see across the river to the mountains on the other side. That classroom is where I learned to read.

They'd taken the desks out of the classroom. There were old mattresses on the floor, no sheets, no blankets. It was very hot. Sometimes the men, the soldiers, came to us. They'd spent fifteen days in the mountains, fighting. Then they came back to rest and have some fun. Some nights there were five, six, seven of them.

*They took turns. They had us, one after the other. I knew some of these men, we'd been in the same school together, sometimes the same classroom, but to them we were just animals. They'd stand around, watching their friends taking their turn. They'd laugh and cheer and say they were making good little Serb soldiers. Soon, they said, there'd be no more Turks in the valley. After a while you feel nothing.*

*Many of the other girls got pregnant, not just me, but most of them gave their babies away. Some of them went to the orphanage in Sarajevo, on Bjelave Hill, but I didn't want that. She was going to be my baby, mine. If it was a girl I was going to call her after my mother. If it was a boy, he'd be called Zahid.*

*In March, when it was still winter, we were taken in a coach to Turbe. Turbe was in the front line where the Serbs were facing the Croats and the Muslims. There was no fighting that day but many coaches came and many many people. I was big. I felt very heavy. I knew the baby would come soon. The Serbs made us get out of the buses and walk across to where the UN soldiers were. It was very cold, very snowy. The soldiers were British and they made us walk in other peoples' footsteps in the snow because of all the mines. The Serbs were laughing at us again. "So long!" they shouted. "Next time you die!"*

*From Turbe we walked to a refugee camp at Travnik. There were no men with us to help and it was worst for the old women. They were so weak they could barely walk. Many of them were crying. The British soldiers were kind. They took the old women in their trucks and carried their things. One soldier saw I was pregnant and gave me a lift. I remember how warm it was once I'd closed the door.*

*There were thousands of us in the camp in Travnik. No one knew what would happen next and everyone was afraid that the Serbs would come again. One of the British soldiers was often in the camp and I knew some English and we began to talk. His name was Rob. He was an engineer trying to fix up the water pipes, stop them freezing, and I started to help him with translation when he needed things. It turned out he'd been in the army a long time but now he was leaving.*

He'd been in Bosnia for six months, since October. He said he'd never seen such things, the refugees, so many people suffering. He sounded so shocked, so angry. He wanted to do more than be a soldier. He wanted to help us.

Fida was born in April. I was still in the camp. She was a wonderful little baby. Rob had gone by this time and I didn't really think I'd ever see him again but early in the summer he came back. He said he'd left the army and gone back to England and bought an old truck. He'd raised money and bought food and blankets and clothing and then come back to Bosnia. When he found me in the camp at Travnik he asked me what I wanted to do when the war was over. I said I didn't know. I couldn't go back to my village, see those men again, those faces, and there was nowhere else in Bosnia I really knew. And so when Rob said that maybe Fida and me could go to England with him I said yes.

He took us first to Split in the truck. There was no problem with the checkpoints. Who wants a Muslim girl with a half-Serb baby? For a Muslim woman it is a terrible thing to be raped. That's why most of the girls gave their babies away. They didn't want people to talk, to know. Me? I just wanted my Fida. She was all I had in the world and all I needed but I'd sworn that she must never know what had happened, who her father might be. That's why going to England was so good for us.

From Split we drove to France. Rob knew all the crossing points, all the little back ways into Europe, so there was no problem. On the boat crossing to Portsmouth, Fida and I had to hide in the back of the lorry. From Portsmouth we took another boat to the Isle of Wight where Rob's mother had the home for old people. That's where we've stayed ever since.

To begin with, Rob went back to Bosnia, many journeys in his old truck. When the war was over the journeys stopped. By that time his mother was sick and he had to take over the home. His mother had cancer. I nursed her until she died.

Rob has never wanted anything from me, not in that way, ever. He knows what happened to me in the war and he knows that war can

*change you. It changed him, too. I know that because friends of his tell me. Rob is a good man, a kind man, strong too, but still very angry. I trust him with Fida which means I trust him with my life.*

*My Fida is eleven now. Sometimes, when it gets hard for me, she takes over. She's like my mother. She knows where the pills are, she talks to me, she looks after me. She still knows nothing about what happened and she never will. But some nights I'm back in the school, back with the soldiers. So much blood. The smell of it. The smell of them. These things you never forget. Fida's a good girl. She's clever, too. She gets the best grades at school. I'm so proud of her.*

*What do I feel about the soldiers? The men who raped me? I hate them. I hate them for what they did to me and also for the fact that many of them knew me and still did those things. One of them, a man called Branko, sent me a letter recently. He said he'd found out my address from Muharem's friend, Dragan the priest. This man Branko said he wanted to come and see me, come and say sorry. He said he had money. He said the money really belonged to me. I said no, stay away. If you come, I'll kill you. I don't think he believed me. But I meant it.*

This is strong stuff, every detail attested by various witnesses. With its sheer weight and impact, coupled with the fact that I'd begun to believe in these people, that Pelly and Lajla were somehow real, came a sense of responsibility to see their story through to the end. No way would I ever be bothered by writer's block. These fictions of mine, the doubles of so many Bosnians, deserved better.

And so the book that became *Blood and Honey* took shape. It begins with the discovery of a headless corpse amongst the rocks beneath Tennyson Down. Joe Faraday is tasked to investigate and launches Operation *Congress*. Putting a name to the body, and figuring out the circumstances that led to the beheading, would be the book's central narrative but I knew by now that I needed to leave at least one foot back in Pompey and so I plotted a separate investigation for Paul Winter.

By now, he'd begun to attract a wide following amongst a rapidly

growing readership. People loved his MO, the way he swaggered through book after book, stitching up anyone who might possibly help secure a result in court. This suggested a near-immunity to misfortune and so I decided the moment had come to put Mr Winter to the test.

His journey through *Blood and Honey* starts with a bust he masterminds on a high-class brothel in Old Portsmouth. A gourmet meal ends with a toot or two of top quality Peruvian flake before the clients peel off with their favoured partner and one of the girls Winter arrests is a tall, angular, extremely dexterous ex-student with fluent French and a serious passion for the poetry of Arthur Rimbaud. This vision, by the name of Maddox, is a bit out of Winter's league but one of her regular clients has begun to frighten her and Winter is only too pleased to offer a little protection. This situation, full of possibilities, is further complicated when Winter – already suffering from persistent headaches – is diagnosed with a brain tumour.

That's as far as my advance plotting took me but one of the book's unexpected delights was the way that Maddox, with the help of Winter's apprentice, D/C Jimmy Suttle, took charge of keeping Winter in one piece. The relationship all three had established by the end of the book, a closeness forged under the toughest of circumstances, took me completely by surprise. It also played a major role in changing aspects of Winter himself, positioning him for a major career change that would frame the books to come. I'd never lived with a character like this before, someone so forceful and alive on the page, and I owed a debt of gratitude to both Maddox and Suttle for hauling him back from the brink.

*Blood and Honey*, as planned, took Faraday away from Pompey. Operation *Congress*, largely conducted on the Isle of Wight, was predictably challenging, and he popped back across the Solent from time to time to try and rescue something from the car crash that was his private life, but in my own head I felt one or two previously shuttered windows beginning to creak open.

Pompey has always been very kind to me. It's a bottomless source of stories, as well as characters, and as a working city it was turning

out to be infinitely more subtle and complex than I'd ever imagined. But with the clamour of life in a patch of land this crowded went an occasional sense of claustrophobia. Pompey, to be frank, was rarely out of your face and it was a bit of a relief to find myself – fictionally at least – to be over the water for a chapter or two.

Something else was happening, as well. Alongside other foreign language deals, the books were beginning to appear in France, first in hardback with Editions du Masque and – a year later – in *livres de poche* with Gallimard. A couple of years back, surfing the promotional wave that launched *Angels Passing*, Lin and I had done a three-cities tour in Canada. The trip had taken us to Banff, Vancouver and finally Toronto and had put me in fairly grand authorial company. We'd met some exceptionally nice people and had a fine time but playing the globe-trotting scribe, while great for my ego, had never felt entirely real. Was this succession of hotel suites and fabulous meals, punctuated by the odd flight, for life? Or had I just lucked in with a book that had caught Orion's attention?

The answer, which came as no surprise, was the latter. We've never been back to Canada, nor did I ever get an American deal, but the French experience was very different. With publication in France came invitations to French crime festivals. The first one, which I shared with a handful of other English crime writers, was in Paris. We had a lot of fun, drank for England, and I ended up on a panel of thirteen crime writers from every corner of Europe, each with his (or her) own interpreter. The resulting debate – in front of a cinema of French *policier* fans – was predictably chaotic.

Most of the questions were exceptionally long and needlessly complicated. I learned later that this is a cultural thing, that French interviewers love a bit of philosophical showboating in front of a captive audience, but at the time it seemed a bit of a puzzle. Most of the answers died in translation before the onset of yet another marathon question and I came away determined that next time I'd drop the translator and try and get by in French.

This proved to be a big ask. At school, in a conversation I've deeply resented ever since, my French master told me I was

completely hopeless and would never speak the language. I scraped a poor “A” level pass, which half-proved him right, but retained a lively interest in most things French. By the time I got the second festival invite I’d started to take the language seriously. This time it was a huge book event in Brussels. It was winter and the city was cloaked in a thin, grey, freezing mist. My editor at Editions du Masque was a woman called Marie-Caroline Aubert. MCA wasn’t the kind of woman who ever took prisoners. If I wanted to do my late afternoon panel in French, then fine. Just make sure you get it right.

By this time I’d sussed that the proper response to a long question was a long answer. I’d also calculated that a *table ronde* lasting – say – an hour, with four writers aboard, would offer me a maximum exposure of three answers. I therefore prepared three longish speeches about Faraday and Winter, about Pompey and about the way that my stories might cross the Channel with a fighting chance of making some impact on *les lecteurs francais*.

With an hour to go before the start of my *table ronde*, I slipped out of the exhibition hall and into the fresh air on the street. Early commuters heading for the nearby train station would have seen a tallish guy in a grey anorak talking to himself about the challenges of writing crime fiction. Had I memorised all three speeches? Yes. Was I frightened? Yes. Might any of the questions conceivably match my pre-prepared answers? Probably not. Did that matter? *Pas du tout*.

That evening, in Brussels, Marie-Caroline took a bunch of us out. We had a fine time. We all got incredibly drunk and ended up in a nightclub where I made a full confession. The French writers present thought it was the funniest thing they’d ever heard. Not because of any special deviousness on my part but because no one had even noticed the bump in the road when I ignored the question and ploughed on regardless. Politicians, of course, do this all the time. One of these guys spoke good English. “This is France,” he told me. “You don’t debate, you *perform*.”

Nice one. When MCA suggested another bottle of Cotes du Rhones I thought it sounded an excellent idea.

“*Salut*,” I reached for my empty glass. “Here’s to crime.”

Next day's hangover put most of the city beyond reach. Lin and I wandered around a nearby *quartier* that was rumoured to be a goldmine of *art nouveau* gems. The rumours turned out to be true though a couple of hours in the company of all that squirreliness didn't do much for my heaving innards.

Later that day, tucked up on the returning Eurostar with a restorative glass of Stella, I began to think about *Blood and Honey* again. By now I was nearing the end of the first draft. Our over-hasty dash to get to Brussels in time for the book fair had left me on the brink of a key scene, and everything that had happened over the last twenty four hours should have wiped the Bosnian nightmare from my memory, yet deep in my subconscious the fictional millstone was still grinding away and to my surprise I had the entire scene on paper seconds before we plunged into the Channel Tunnel. I remember the moment I looked up from my A4 pad at the roaring darkness, my reflection caught in the window beside me. How come the words could still form themselves into coherent sentences? What strange chemistry pushes a story like this towards its end?

Here's part of the scene. Faraday is in the interview room with Rob Pelly. Pelly is drunk. Faraday wants to know what plans he has for the future.

*"Bosnia." He said at once. "Land of the free."*

*"Why?"*

*The question hung in the air. A smile spread across Pelly's face. Partly disbelief, partly something close to contempt.*

*"Why? Have you looked round lately? Have you blokes got eyes in your head? The state of the place? Kids bossing the streets? Crap schools? Foul-mouthed women? Tossplot politicians? Half the population pissed? The rest locked in at home watching crap TV? Is that where you want to live? Seriously?"*

*"But why Bosnia?"*

*"Because it's not here. And because my wife wants to go home. She misses it, Mr Faraday. Bosnia was a bad place once. Really*



evil. I brought her over here to get her away from all that. And you know what? Ten years of England and she can't wait to get back. You're talking about a woman who was gang raped for three solid months. Who watched the Serbs beating her father up. Who lost her mother and a brother and the house she'd been born in and every other fucking thing to those goons. That leaves a scar or two, believe me, yet she can't wait to get back. So what does that tell you about England, eh?"

"You met her in Bosnia?"

"Yeah." Pelly nodded.

"Travnik?"

Mention of Travnik put a new expression on Pelly's face and for a tiny moment Faraday saw the steel in the man. No matter how much he'd had to drink, there was still a sentry at his gate.

"You know about Travnik?"

"I know there was a refugee camp there. And I know you were at Vitez. Engineers build things, mend things." Faraday shrugged. "You wouldn't have been short of work."

"And I wasn't, my friend. Believe me. Anyone half decent...." He shook his head, his eyes brimming. "Fucking unbelievable. The Serbs just dumped them. I saw it happen. Two feet of snow. Night coming on. These poor bloody women with nothing left in the world except their kids. And you know what those Serb bastards were saying? So long! So long! Next time you die! I can hear them now. Cunts."

"Was Lajla one of those women?"

"Yeah. And seven months pregnant. Came from a village up near Banja Luka. Lived there all her life. Fucking Serbs rolled them over. Took forty minutes. You ever hear of the camp at Omarska? No? Count yourself fucking lucky." He eyed Faraday a moment, a man with a great deal of news to impart, then he made a visible effort, controlled himself, sat upright in the chair. "What is this?" he said softly. "What are you trying to get out of me?"

"I'm trying to understand the way it was."

"For me? You're wasting your time. You should be asking about

her. About Lajla. And about all the other Lajlas. You know the one thing you should never be in the Balkans? A woman. Not then. Not the way it was with the Serbs.”

When the Serbs cleared a village, he said, they started with the men and the boys. They went to the camps. Then they came back for the women. Lajla and her mother ended up in the same truck. The truck dropped Lajla at the school. She never saw her mother again.

“And at the school?”

“They’d cleared a classroom at the back. There were stained old fucking mattresses on the floor, no sheets, no blankets, just the mattresses. The Serb boys spent fifteen days in the mountains, then they came back, six or seven of them at a time, one after another, cheering and clapping, making good little Serb soldiers. Can you believe that? In the classroom where this poor bloody girl had learned to read? Jesus.”

“And she got pregnant?”

“Yeah, just a bit. But you know the worst of it? She knew these animals. Christ, she’d even been to school with some of them. And there they were, just helping themselves.”

Faraday tried to imagine what it must have been like. For the second time in 24 hours, he knew it was beyond him. More blood than honey, he thought.

Pelly was gazing out of the window. The anger had drained away. He looked almost sober.

“One thing I don’t understand.” Faraday frowned. “How come she wants to go back to this place? To this village? After all she’s been through?”

“She doesn’t. Not to her home village. We’ve got somewhere else in mind. The Jablanica Valley. Village called Celebici. Nice little smallholding near the lake, bit of ground, couple of goats, chickens, spare room for German tourists, maybe a spot of freelance mine clearance if things get tight. Yeah...” he nodded. “...I can cope with that.”

Pelly lapsed into silence. Faraday was clearer now about what drove Pelly, about those months in the mountains that had changed

*his life. Any man who'd been through an experience like that would carry the images in his head forever. But what about Lajla? Gang-raped week after week? A woman who'd never know who'd fathered her child? How would you ever lay so many ghosts?*

*He put the question to Pelly. It drew an immediate shake of the head.*

*"She won't talk about it."*

*"Not to anyone?"*

*"No. Not to me. Not to you. Not to fucking anyone." He touched his head, then his heart. "It's locked away. You'd be a brave man to even try and get at stuff like that."*

*"Why?"*

*"Why?" Pelly threw back his head and laughed. "Because she'd fucking kill you."*

I quote this passage partly in disbelief that bits of my hammered brain were still fully functional, but mostly because it sheds light on the way all that reading in the early research stages of *Blood and Honey* finally shaped a key scene that – in essence – explains where the book came from. The monologues I wrote were a key step in that process, a way of turning reportage into character, and in books to come I was to use this technique again and again.

## *Eight*

It was at this point, 2004, that we decided to leave Pompey. Both our dads had passed away some time ago, and Lin's mum had also died. My own mother was very frail and the time had come to put her into a nursing home. Since the late Eighties, we'd had a third floor flat overlooking the coast in a lovely old Regency house in Exmouth and when the chance came to buy the flat above, thus turning the top half of the property into a proper home, we knew we had to go for it. To pay for what needed to be done we needed to sell our Southsea house so we put it on the market, packed our bags, and headed west.

Turning our backs on Pompey was a real moment for both of us. Lin had been born in Southsea and grew up amongst the bomb sites and buddleia of the post-war city. For my part, I'd settled very happily in the late Seventies, and owed the Old Bruiser a huge professional debt. A couple of stand-alone thrillers had been rooted in Portsmouth, before the current Faraday series was even a gleam in the eye. I'd been lucky enough to write and co-produce the city's Millenium pageant (a cathedral-based entertainment called *Willoughby and Son*), plus a number of dramatic monologues to mark important episodes in the city's history. For the last six years I'd also been

writing my regular Monday column for the Pompey News. This is how I said goodbye.

*Leaving Portsmouth is the oddest experience. My wife is a Pompey gal. I've lived in the city for nearly thirty years and have the scars on my liver to prove it. Between us we've watched change after change wash over this tiny, crowded island. Some of these changes, like the physical look of the place, have been an immeasurable improvement. Others, too numerous to list, less so.*

*When I first came to Portsmouth I was overwhelmed by the gruffness of its charm. Here was a working city that never bothered to doff its cap to either reputation or status. You sank or swam by how you rode life's punches. In this respect, and in many others, playing inside right for Armada in the Pompey Dockyard League – and surviving to tell the tale – was an invaluable lesson.*

*Since then, I've met some of the nicest and most genuine people in the world and made friendships I know will see me out. The currency of mateship in this city is measured in wry half-conversations, in pub banter, in the tacit acknowledgement that the world is well and truly barmy and that life is all the better for the fact that Pompey has always turned its back on the rest of the UK.*

*What will I miss? The list is endless. It includes Southsea neighbours, the view from Hot Walls, the swim out to the deep-water buoy off Clarence Pier, and the long conversations afterwards with an amazing mix of people in the shadow of Spur Redoubt. John Molyneux and his cadre of colleagues from Respect have been an inspiration, as has the sadly-missed Sarah Quail.*

*The Central Library, for which Sarah has been responsible, remains a shining light in the gathering cultural darkness and I owe a huge debt of gratitude to the small army of assorted locals who have helped me put Pompey on the page, either in this newspaper or in the on-going series of Joe Faraday crime thrillers.*

*But the other Pompey that will always stay with me is that unique fusion of the familiar and the truly historical with which this city is so richly blessed. The cold April morning when the Falklands Task Force*

*put to sea. The summer afternoon, months later, when HMS Glamorgan ghosted back through the harbour narrows, her starboard quarter torn open by an enemy Exocet. Two centuries earlier, similar crowds would have been cheering HMS Victory on her return from the Battle of Trafalgar.*

*This, in short, is a city in which history shapes us all. Remember the chant at the Fratton End? Pompey 'Till I Die...*

We settled cheerfully in Exmouth, surrounded by builders. It rained a great deal which was a problem because we didn't have a roof but a collective effort finally secured the huge blue tarpaulin that sheltered us from the elements. Our Southsea house took a while to sell, which stretched our finances to the limit, but a buyer paid up just days before we had to settle the bill for the Exmouth refurb. My mum was content in a nursing home round the corner and my son, Tom, was living with his partner Kate in the flat below us. The cat was slowly coming to terms with life on the third floor and we organised a rota to keep mum well supplied with red Martini. The only box left unticked belonged to Farrars. Where next for Pompey's finest?

This would be Book Seven and the yeast for the fictional mix appeared in the residue of a dream. I'd woken early. For once it wasn't raining. I lay in bed, listening to the birds, trying to tease out the knot of images that still lay deep in my brain. I'd been having some kind of nightmare. It featured a naked body chained to a railway track. The body was in a tunnel. It belonged to a man. It wasn't me but he had to do something sharpish because – in the dream - I could hear the distant rumble of a train.

This setting, as it happened, had already featured in a previous book, *Deadlight*, in which a washed-up drunk – key to the developing plot – walks into the darkness of the tunnel and dies beneath the wheels of a London-bound express. The tunnel takes the Pompey main line under the South Downs and emerges beside the village of Buriton. I knew it well because I'd paid it a quiet visit to make sure I got the details right. Nothing is scarier than ducking into the shelter of one of those trackside refuges as the Waterloo Flyer thunders past.

I suspected a naked body chained to a railway line would make for a powerful opening scene but before I got down to more research I had to work out why he was there, and what would happen next. I pondered this challenge for a day or two, knowing deep down that the answer lay with the guy I'd name-checked in my farewell column.

John Molyneux was a huge, burly academic from the College of Art and Design with no dress sense and a full beard. He had a couple of academic books to his name, and knew a great deal about Rembrandt, but his other passion was politics. John was a lifelong leftie. He'd pitched his tent amongst fellow travellers from Respect, The Socialist Workers Party and the ever more vocal Stop-the-War Movement, and emerged as their intellectual leader.

John himself was a gifted speaker. He had a fine voice and knew how to think on his feet. He was prepared to take on difficult audiences in pretty much any context – indoors or out – and was undaunted in the face of widespread apathy. On Saturdays, you'd see him outside Tesco's in Southsea's Albert Road, a big man in a scruffy leather jacket thrusting agitprop at passing shoppers. I admired his resilience and his sheer dedication. This wasn't a guy who wrote the odd letter to the paper and called it a day. He really got stuck in.

By now, according to George Bush, the Iraq War was over. A year earlier, stung once again by something I'd picked up from the media, I'd penned a column about the aftermath of the invasion.

*So short is our collective memory span these days that it came as a bit of a shock to catch news coverage of last week's Athens EU summit and see enraged Greeks battling with riot police to protest against the coalition warmongers in Iraq.*

*But the war is over, surely? We and the Americans won, Saddam is history, and millions of Iraqis are tasting the sweet fruits of democracy. Bush's approval ratings are topping 120 per cent and our own sainted leader – after Pope John Paul II and Mother Teresa – is in line for the Congressional Gold Medal.*

*Al Qaeda? Gone to ground. North Korea? Frightened witless. The Middle East? Sorted.*

*So why all the fuss in Athens? Don't these people realise the world moves on?*

*The truth, of course, is that nothing is sorted – and deep down we all know it. Hence, perhaps, the extraordinary media attention devoted to 12 year old Ali Abbas, who lost both arms plus ten members of his family when a US Air Force “smart” missile got itself in a tizzie and levelled his house.*

*The pictures I've seen of Ali show a bewildered boy who can't quite work out what's happened to the rest of his life. With the exception of his missing limbs and charred torso he looks alarmingly like my nephew Harry. Harry lives in North London and should be relatively safe from American missiles but the way the Project for the New American Century is going, you can never be really sure. Harry, in some future spasm of ultra violence, might well find himself paying the going rate for a stiff dose of democracy.*

*Ali Abbas has become the conscience of the nation and people are eager to do whatever they can for him but there isn't a big enough cheque in the world to restore that child to the life to which he had every entitlement. Ask Ali, or the thousands of other Iraqis maimed by Allied bombing, whether Bush-style liberation was a fair trade for crippling injury and you might – at last – have some notion of the price of freedom inflicted by our leaders.*

*All this is sobering stuff but behind Ali Abbas lurks another truth, equally uncomfortable. The sad tally of events since Christmas offers incontrovertible proof that we, like poor limbless Ali, are effectively helpless when it comes to the big decisions.*

*We can protest all day, we can march all week, we can write countless letters, we can petition hundreds of MPs, and absolutely nothing happens.*

*Blair explains – and may well even believe – that he took us to war in the name of democracy. Shame, then, that he didn't listen when millions of us turned up on his doorstep and voted with our feet.*

Shortly after this piece was published, John acquired a list of the thousands of Iraqi civilians killed by coalition forces and contacted



friends across the city. His plan was to hold a marathon reading of the names in Pompey's Guildhall Square. Each of us were to spend ten minutes at the microphone. Just the names. Nothing else.

My turn came at dusk. It was a freezing night yet little knots of people had gathered as a mark of respect, or perhaps protest. A bunch of drunken kids were going their best to disrupt proceedings but the grown-ups ignored them. An occasion like this, with the war so recently and so decisively won, was by no means popular across the city as a whole. It was to take another year of collateral damage, of savage sectarian warfare, and of the slow disintegration of Iraq before the penny dropped. The two million of us who had bothered to march in London had been right. The war had turned a functioning sophisticated society, with which we were only happy to trade, into a basket case. Nice one, guys. Iran, anybody?

Viewed from my new perch in the West Country, this kind of political turf – occupied by committed lefties – offered all kinds of prospects. I'd met a number of these people and in a society gorging itself on consumer choice and crap TV they represented something very different. They read a lot. They understood the subtler hypocrisies of the system we called democracy. And they were prepared to take a stand.

And so I invented a 29 year old political activist called Mark Duley, a guy who divides his time between writing novels, falling in love, and changing the world. In none of these three respects has he met with any great success but that's not the point. Duley isn't a man to ever stop trying.

Faraday meets him early on in the book that will become *One Under*. At this point, he has a shrewd suspicion that Duley, what's left of him, is the guy in the tunnel.

*Faraday reached for his keyboard and typed in his access code. Moments later, he was into the site, transcribing Duley's name and date of birth. Up came the details. Over the past ten years, Duley had collected fines, plus a suspended prison sentence, for a number*

of offences, mainly riot, affray and criminal damage. Faraday sped through the list, recognising a pattern in the arrest locations. Trafalgar Square. Edinburgh. Sellafeld. Aldermaston. Newhaven Docks. In certain political circles, this lot would read like a war record. Young Duley, it seemed, was a serial activist, never far from the action when a big demo turned violent and the ninja squads waded in.

He sat back a moment, gazing at the screen. Faraday had never been the slightest bit interested in politics, especially the wilder extremes, happy to leave Special Branch to keep tabs on the hairies and assorted no-hopers that took their protests onto the streets. But even he knew enough about the lunatic fringe to have trouble coaxing a pattern from Duley's half dozen court appearances. Here was a guy who plainly had strong feelings about more or less everything: Globalisation, the Iraq War, Animal Rights, Nuclear Waste, Asylum Seekers, Anti-Personnel Mines, and the Trident Missile Programme. Was there any cause this man hadn't supported?

There was a custody photograph attached to the file. Duley was 5'11", male, white, weighed 64 kilos, had brown eyes, blond hair cropped short, and – at the time of his last arrest – no identifying birthmarks or tattoos. The face in the photo seemed to have treated the arrest process as a kind of audition. The head was tilted back slightly, the eyes half-closed, the stubbled chin thrust out. It was a shot, thought Faraday, that any actor would have been proud of, and something told him that Duley might even have asked the Custody Sergeant for copies. This guy had no fear of the law. On the contrary, he probably papered his bedroom with photocopies of his various indictments.

Duley was to die in the opening pages of *One Under* but already I sensed that even posthumously he had the kind of energy that would power the book forward. Some women of my acquaintance find this kind of raw political commitment a real turn-on and it wasn't long before I'd come up with Jenny Mitchell, a young, attractive mother of two. Jenny will live in Old Portsmouth. She'll be partnered to a social entrepreneur, one of the new super-cool breed of businessmen

currently cutting a swath through Pompey café-bars. She'll meet Duley at a Respect get-together. And he'll help her recognise the emptiness of a life that has ceased to nourish her. I'd yet to work out what would lie beyond that first meeting but before I got down to writing in earnest I needed to find out a great deal more about running people over in railway tunnels.

In these circumstances, you lift the phone. My first call went to the British Transport Police HQ in London. I explained I was writing a book in a crime series and I needed the driver's eye view of an incident with a body on a railway line. The voice on the other end hadn't got much time for authors. Why didn't I talk to their regional branch in Southampton?

Good idea. I phoned Southampton. It was a woman this time. She said she'd contact their office in Portsmouth and have them call me. I waited a couple of days before the phone rang. I already knew a couple of guys from BTP in Pompey but this was a voice I didn't recognise. I went through my little storyline again and asked him for an hour of his time. He was grumpy. If I wanted to talk the thing through then it had to be tomorrow. Half eight. Not a second later. At that time in the morning, Pompey is three and a half hours from where we live. A five am start? No problem.

Next day I was at Pompey's town station for half eight. The BTP office is accessed via a secured door on the left of the station premises. I rang the entry phone and introduced myself. A secretary came down to let me in. The guy I was due to meet, Mr Grumpy, was evidently upstairs waiting. And she warned me that he was in a very bad mood.

I climbed the stairs behind her. I hadn't had time for breakfast and I was starving hungry. The squad room lay at the end of a corridor. The secretary stepped aside to let me in. As I pushed the door open I became aware of a handful of blokes waiting inside. These were the guys I knew already. A table in the middle of the room was piled high with copies of my books, all readied for the authorial signature. They'd already been out for sticky buns and had the kettle on the go. All the grumpy stuff was a wind-up.

We settled in for a chat. I briefly explained the set-up: I wanted to set the book in high summer. I wanted to know when the last of the previous day's trains would have cleared the tunnel. I wanted to open the book with the first London-bound train to leave Pompey the following morning. I needed the reader to be in the cab, alongside the driver, and to share his view as the mouth of the tunnel approached. The body would be chained to the rails at the far end of the tunnel. By that time the driver's eyes would have adjusted to the sudden darkness. The throw of the train's headlights would pick up something bulky, something white, on the line ahead. How would he react? How long do these trains take to stop under emergency braking? What would he do once the train had come to a halt? How would he *feel*?

The guys loved it. In these situations – if you're wise- you always say "we" instead of "I". This was to be our book, not mine, a collaborative exercise scored for *pain raisin* and lashings of Easy Shopper coffee. Between them they sorted out a headcode for the train, the exact time of departure from Portsmouth Harbour Station, plus the likely time of entry into the tunnel. They contacted an off-duty driver to give me the speed the train would be doing, and the distance he'd need to stop. A handset in the cab would enable him to contact the nearest signal box. He'd need the power turning off plus various emergency services to help evacuate the train. A BTP Inspector would be tasked to attend, ahead of the incident being handed to civvie police.

I was still with the driver in the cab. Procedures always fascinate me. What, exactly, does the driver say when he gets through on the phone?

One of the BTP guys was a lovely guy called Monksy. He was a huge fan of the books.

"We just told you," he said. "He'd report the incident. Give a location. Explain what had happened."

"Sure, I know that, but what would he *say*?"

Monksy looked blank. He thought they'd already nailed the question. I asked him again. There has to be a special phrase. There

always is. Imagine the guy on the phone. Tell me what he actually says.

"Ah, gotcha..." Monksy was grinning. "...yeah."

"So what does he say?"

"You mean in real life?"

"Yeah."

"He says 'one under'. That's the phrase you use for a jumper at a station, some nutter who ends up under the train. It would be the same in this situation. Yeah...one under."

I wrote the phrase down. Perfect title.

We had more coffee. I signed the books. Then Monksy asked me whether there was anything else I needed. By now, belatedly, I'd realised I was very close to realising my lifetime's ambition. Since I was a kid, I've been dying to drive a real train. I looked Monksy in the eye, told him how the writer had to get inside the head of every character he created, had to understand how it felt to be this fictitious person, had to know exactly how he or she would react in certain situations, had to *become* this character.

Monksy was grinning again. He'd based an entire career on seeing through bullshit like this.

"You want to drive a train, right?"

"Right."

"No problem, mate." He checked his watch. "You know the Driver's Depot, back of Fratton Station? Be there for 10.45."

I phoned Lin. This was unbelievable, God's little present for getting on the road so early. She laughed, told me I was far too smooth for my own good. One day you'll get sussed, she said.

"Yeah? And then what?"

"God knows. Make some notes and tell me about it."

I was at Fratton Drivers' Depot bang on 10.45. A BTP Sergeant called Derek Bish introduced me to a training supervisor called Andy, himself an ex-train driver. Andy had made arrangements for us to commandeer the next London train. The real driver would find himself in First Class for the ride up to Petersfield, after which our little party would take the next train back south.

Minutes later, the three of us were crowded into the cab of one of the new Siemens electric units. As we eased through the nether reaches of Copnor Andy showed me how the controls worked. I couldn't believe how easy, how smooth, it was. We stopped at Havant then headed north again. By now the tunnel was minutes away. Andy was in the driving seat. I'd already explained about the body in the tunnel but now it occurred to me that I had to find a way of getting him there. On a map I'd been studying yesterday, there seemed to be some kind of gate that offered access from a trackside wood. Andy and Derek looked at each other. The wood was rapidly approaching on the left hand side. Derek thought he knew exactly where I meant. Andy braked. The train slowed to a crawl.

"There..." Derek was pointing. "No, there...."

Andy shook his head. Maybe we'd already passed it. By now the train had come to a halt. I stared at them both. This was research gone mad. Was Andy going to take the train *backwards*? To help me solve some half-baked plot to smuggle a guy into a tunnel at the dead of night? I shot Derek a look, said it wouldn't be a problem, told him I'd drive up here and take a walk in the woods and find out for myself.

"Like you were the murderer?" Derek had been listening to me earlier. "Doing it for real?"

I love encounters like that. There have been more of them than you can possibly imagine and one of the things they give you is that little jolt of excitement that tells you you're probably on the money. These people believe what you've told them. They've bought into Duley and Jenny Mitchell. And they want to do their level best to make sure you get the details exactly right. Magic.

The following day, on the phone, I set about extending my tunnel research to the impact on Duley himself. A conversation with Bernard Knight, both a working pathologist and a guy who writes excellent crime books, wised me up to the mysteries of head deflection and flange damage. After an encounter with a train, he said, most people are in bits. This I could well believe. Still in Pompey, I went to meet a Crime Scene Coordinator, Martin Chudleigh. It would be Martin who'd

be in charge of the carnage in the tunnel and he spent half a morning explaining exactly what he'd do. Collection bags, he said, were a priority. Lots of them.

That same day I met Andy Harrington and over lunch he gave me an update on current street prices for a cocaine sub-plot. That afternoon, busy boy that I was, I spent a fascinating couple of hours with Jake, the guy who worked in the mortuary at St Mary's hospital. Jake was a huge Pompey fan and had come up with an idea for the perfect murder. This I subsequently offered to Paul Winter who, of course, promptly turned it to his own advantage. That evening, knackered, I had a final meet with Susan Newcombe who ran the Portsmouth Council of Community Services. I knew a number of social entrepreneurs in the city but I needed an over-view of exactly where these creatures belonged in the fast-changing food chain that was community care. She obliged, both on and off the record.

Back in Devon, it was time to shape the book's plot. Unlike some writers, I never do this in great detail. Jilly Cooper, for instance, is said to write herself a detailed series of scene-by-scene breakdowns that could easily extend to 50,000 words. By the end of this exercise she'd know exactly what every character would be doing to every other character for the entire length of the story. It undoubtedly works for her, because her stuff sells in squillions, but I think I'd find myself disheartened by having to write the thing not once but twice. The element of surprise, the moment when a character does something you'd least expect, is as important for me, the scribe, as it is for the readers and without that shiver of delight – plus the knowledge that I'm heading into the unknown – my writing days would be a great deal emptier.

A little light plotting turned out to be extremely productive and by late summer, under our glorious new Exmouth roof, I had all my characters on their starting blocks. Duley, poor man, was about to spend an uncomfortable night in Buriton Tunnel. Faraday raised a glass of Rioja to a spectacular sunset and retired early. While Winter, now recovered from the traumas of brain surgery, was looking forward to another week of light duties. Both my detectives, in their separate

ways, were to be seriously challenged by the wreckage that Mr Duley left behind him, not least Winter – who would end up trying to suss Jake's perfect murder.

The first draft of *One Under* took me to Christmas. Simon adored it. There was very little revision to be done before it was readied for the printers and by the end of January, I was at a loose end.

By now, the series was floating on a raft of seriously great reviews. Here's Ed Vulliamy, a gifted investigative reporter with the *Observer* whose article on the Serb holding camp at Omarska I'd plundered for *Blood and Honey*.

"This is crime writing with attitude," he wrote. "Graham Hurley's D/I Joe Faraday is everything that Inspector Morse is not and the books are all the more impressive because Faraday's beat isn't leafy Oxford but the netherworld of Portsmouth. Authentic, bleak and richly documentary, the Faraday series offers the key to an entire city. Read these books and you'll understand why Blair's Britain is falling apart".

And this from Mark Timlin, still with the *Independent on Sunday*.

"Joe Faraday returns in *Deadlight*. Now part of the city's elite Major Crime Team, he investigates the death of an unpopular prison officer and discovers that the trail goes back to the officer's naval service during the Falklands War. This is how a crime novel should be written and it pushes Hurley right to the forefront of British crime writers where he richly deserves to be."

Or this from Margaret Cannon on the Toronto *Globe and Mail*

"Readers who haven't already found the brilliant Joe Faraday series of novels by Graham Hurley should pick up the latest superb episode, *Cut to Black*. Hurley is one of the best of the new crop of realistic cop-shop writers and British to boot. He's a very different kind of writer to Ian Rankin but every bit as good."

Or this from the *Literary Review*

"Not being police officers, most readers have to take on trust the accuracy of Graham Hurley's account of their work but there is no doubt that his series of police procedural novels is one of the best since the genre was invented more than half a century ago."



Each of these reviews, and there are dozens more of them, made me believe that I'd delivered on my half of the deal proposed at that long-ago lunch when Malcolm Edwards suggested I change course and become a crime writer. Yet the books were failing to appear in major book chains and the promotional support for each launch was largely confined to a reviewers' lunch in London and a couple of signings in the Pompey area.

The reviewers lunch was undoubtedly helpful and it was good to be able to put a face to these glowing reviews. But there was no sign of serious promotion, no budget set aside for newspaper ads or display posters, and it became a bit of a piss-off to see my fellow scribes papering the walls of railway stations up and down the country while Faraday and Winter lingered in the sidings. Even the Portsmouth branch of WH Smith's didn't stock my books.

These are hundreds of writers like me marooned in the mid-list, and I was only too aware that simply staying in print – with fabulous jackets and excellent editorial back-up – was a substantial triumph. Nonetheless I had the feeling that I was somehow being short-changed. Orion had pushed the promotional boat out with *Angels Passing*, but nothing of that scale had happened since - with the exception of a promised "major marketing campaign" for *Blood and Honey* which had failed to materialise.

I wondered first about raising this whole issue with Simon, my editor, but I sensed the battles he'd fought in-house on my behalf and I suspected that he'd pretty much run out of bullets for his editorial gun. I therefore decided to aim a little higher and frame a careful letter to the man responsible for the series in the first place. By this time, Malcolm Edwards was Orion's Deputy CEO.

*3<sup>rd</sup> February, 2006.*

*Dear Malcolm,*

*I'm not quite sure of your current responsibility for Orion's fiction output but here goes. Seven years ago, you invited me to try my hand at crime fiction. Specifically, the challenge was to do a Rankin on*

Portsmouth.

*With one or two misgivings, I accepted – and six books later I have, I think, make some impact. The series has built a strong readership, both here and abroad, and the critics have been more than kind. Reader support through my website is extremely heartening and this month's PLR figures will*

*reveal 136,000 loans for the Faraday series. Ironically, Publishing News recently described yours truly as "every bit as strong as Ian Rankin". As of this week, he and I now find ourselves on the Theakston's crime prize long list.*

*"Blood and Honey" came to market last month. The Sunday Telegraph has applauded "another first rate thriller from a writer who is firmly up there with the best." As I understand it, you're about to reprint both hardback and trade p/back editions against outstanding dues. And all this after cancellation of the "major marketing campaign" promised on the back of the bound proofs.*

*My point, Malcolm, is this: I think I can fairly claim to have delivered on your original mission statement. All the indicators are now looking extremely promising. Simon believes next year's book, One Under, in his phrase, to be "stonking" (I think that means OK). Cancellation of the marketing campaign for "Blood and Honey" was, to be frank, extremely disappointing. Might I ask for a meeting to discuss Orion's forward strategy for the series?*

I never got an answer from Malcolm. A couple of days later I had a call from Simon. He sounded unusually fraught, even angry. My letter, he said, had been passed to Lisa Milton who had recently joined Orion after a highly successful career in retail, managing the giant Waterstones bookshop in Piccadilly and subsequently moving on to head Book Club Associates. Lisa, it seemed, had been pretty unimpressed by the contents of my letter, a reaction all the more regrettable because she'd evidently been planning to descend on Devon for a one-to-one meeting. This, of course, I couldn't possibly have known but I was intrigued nonetheless. Was her trip still on? It wasn't.

Instead Simon and John Wood took the train down from London. John, whom I knew already, was Publishing Director for Trade Fiction, which gave him a good deal of in-house clout. The weather was brilliant, a cloudless blue sky with views along the coast down to the distant smudge of Torbay. Lin and I had laid on a light fish lunch on our new balconette and after we'd emptied the first bottle of Chablis we settled down to serious business.

The good news was that Lisa had found time to read the MS of *One Under*. The bad news was that she found important elements in the book a bit of a turn-off for certain key demographics in the marketplace. Her real beef was Jenny Mitchell. The woman was too compliant. She'd gone along with Duley far too easily. She need to be stronger, more modern, more cool. The way I'd written her would cut little ice with feisty metropolitan career women in their late twenties, early thirties, who evidently led a very different kind of life.

This was a bit of a blow. What did Lisa want me to do? The deal, it seemed, went like this. If I'd like to re-write the book along the indicated lines, turning it into a must-read for these busy young women on the Tube commute into work, then Lisa would consider putting some promotional money behind it. Otherwise I was on my own.

That afternoon, while Simon and John were still with us, I gave the proposition some thought. There were two problems. The first was that Lin and I were about to depart on a lengthy trek around Europe in our old camper van. This was to end at a very posh French crime festival at Frontignan, on the Mediterranean coast. I knew Marie-Caroline had worked hard to secure the invite and would never forgive me if I didn't turn up.

The other problem was simpler. I understood the book well enough to be sure that it wouldn't work without Jenny's preparedness to embark on an affair with Mark Duley. She does this on her own terms, with a little of Madame Bovary's recklessness, but the whole point of the book was the fragility of the middle-class cocoon she'd built for herself. Turn her into someone harder, and maybe younger, and much of that impact would be lost. This was bad enough. What

was worse was the fact that I knew zilch about the kind of women that John and Simon (and obviously Lisa) were talking about. And, to be frank, I doubted my ability to invent them.

Simon and John left to catch the train back to London. We were on good terms and I hope we have remained so. But what that afternoon had given me was a brief glimpse of the kind of compromises that were probably required if I was to break into the big time. Breaking into the big time meant wall-to-wall display ads, advertorials in the national media, big splashy promotional tours, the whole schtick. Only that way would you secure a place in the top ten.

That I understood. It was exactly for that reason that I'd written to Malcolm in the first place. But what I now realised that Orion – and doubtless every other publisher in the country – would only risk that kind of money if they felt they were sitting on a sure-fire best-seller. In that respect, none of my books measured up, and none of them ever would. Why not? Because they were too complex, too subtle, and altogether too preoccupied with the way things really happened.

Several months later, over a pint of two in a pub off Long Acre, Simon put it rather well.

"You know your problem?" he said. "You write too well."

In one sense, this was deeply depressing. How can you possibly write *too well*? But in another, it clarified everything. My books would stay in print. The Design Department would re-jacket them for the second time and Sales would do their level best to get them out in the marketplace. Faraday and Winter were gradually building a truly loyal readership and one day – who knows? - I might find myself looking at a contract for a TV series. In the meantime I was a solid upper echelon mid-list scribe with a licence to do it my way.

Could I live with that? I could.

There's a telling post-script to this little episode. Afterwards, Lisa and I agreed, by e-mail, to meet over the next couple of months and get to know each other a little better. Six years later, it's yet to happen.

## *Nine*

I owe Book Eight, which turned out to be *The Price of Darkness*, to a guy called Harry Pounds. Sadly Harry is dead now but he built a Pompey fortune on the back of a scrap and salvage business that operated on a scruffy piece of wasteland at Tipner adjoining the upper reaches of Portsmouth Harbour. He bought derelict warships, submarines and other bits of military kit and feasted on the bones of our Cold War navy. Once the M275 had been built, funnelling traffic into the city from the M27, drivers coming into the city had a dress-circle view of Harry's empire. The piles of rusting scrap and the half-submerged tug beside the jetty were never pretty, and the gauntness of the Greyhound Stadium behind didn't help, but whoever thought that this was the snarl on Pompey's face had – in my view – got it wrong. The city owed its very existence to century after century of war. This just happened to be Harry's riff on all those years of violence.

For as long as I can remember, there'd been plans to tidy up these tired acres. The land itself, thanks to its waterside position, was extremely valuable and as the Ministry of Defence began to loosen its grip on other sites around the city, developers began to inquire what might happen to Harry's gateway site. The new Gunwharf development was pulling in crowds of gawkers from all over Southern England. The harbourside apartments had been snapped up at eye-watering prices. Surely there was money to be made at Tipner?

This possibility fascinated me because it coincided with a very public collapse in people's trust in what Blair and his courtiers once called "the New Labour project". Tides of scandal were lapping at the government's door. Ministers were sitting in the laps of big business. There was, said Peter Mandelson, absolutely nothing wrong in making yourself filthy rich. This was provocative stuff and when Lord Levy, the Prime Minister's tennis partner, was arrested for his alleged part in the honours-for-loans scandal, the dam burst.

Here was a guy who'd raised £41 million for a political party that was effectively bankrupt. Most of those loans appeared to be soft, thus breaking the government's own law, introduced only six years ago. Worse still, the government seemed to have abandoned a growing army of men and women nearing retirement who'd been robbed of their pensions after the collapse of company after company. Elected as agents of change, pledged to re-establish fairness and opportunity after the me-first chaos of the Major administration, New Labour had turned its back on the people who had put it into office. Since 1997, membership of the party had nearly halved.

As chillier winds began to cool the economy ahead of the Lehman's collapse, I pondered what kind of book might find space for this growing sense of disgust at what our political masters were up to, and the more I thought about it, the more certain I became that the tastiest fictional opportunity lay in Harry's scrap yard site. This, after all, was most people's first glimpse of Pompey. What was the council planning to do about it?

I made some phone calls. I had a number of contacts inside the Civic Centre because I'd worked on projects for the Strategy Unit over

the years, and within days I was the road back to Pompey.

Mike Mortimer was the guy heading the Tipner Regeneration project. His office walls were jig sawed with site plans and those wonderful architect's drawings peopled with figures who've never seen the inside of a Custody Centre or one of the rougher inner city pubs. We talked about the history of the place. Way back in the seventeenth century it had been a musket range. Since, then successive wars had dumped countless layers of toxic gunk including gunpowder, saltpetre, diesel fuel, glue residues, asbestos, tars, and sundry other chemicals. It was going to cost £53 million for the clean up alone and for that kind of money the only kind of development that would make any kind of profit would have to be residential.

This was where the conversation quickened. Mike talked me through the figures. On top of the clean-up bill, the developer would be looking at construction costs of between £200 million and £220 million, including infrastructure costs plus offset Section 106 planning gains (don't ask). On a rising market, given the trophy waterside views, that would still leave a profit of around £40 million.

This, to little me, seemed a decent return for the kind of freewheeling property developers I was beginning to develop in my head, though Mike warned me of the other problems they'd face. Negotiations over the site would be complicated by the sheer number of public bodies involved: Portsmouth City Council (the local authority), The South-East England Development Agency (the strategic authority), the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister (for Regional Planning), the Department of Transport (for the motorway links), and the Ministry of Defence (which owned adjoining land). All this was grist to my fictional mill – a light seasoning of planning-speak always gives a scene a bit of authenticity – and the realisation that there were so many governmental fingers in the Pompey pie was a real windfall. My book, after all, would hopefully be holding New Labour's feet to the fire. What better location than Pompey's front door?

Leaving the Civic Centre that morning, I was certain that the book was a runner. My property developers, Mallinder, Benskin, would be

bidding for the Gateway site. One of these two men would bung a sizeable sum of money into the pot for a local Academy school. I'd already obtained the going rate for these kinds of contributions from the Bow Group website, and for his £2.5million, Jonathan Mallinder would be hoping for considerable leverage with the Ministry of Defence. The rifle ranges which adjoined the Gateway site were, according to Mike Mortimer, the real icing on the development cake. To date, the MOD were resisting all suitors but if the land was ever released it would earn the successful bidder a fortune.

Sadly, Mike's knowledge didn't extend to the on-going pensions scandal but that didn't matter because I was about to meet another guy for lunch. Six years later he still prefers to remain anonymous so we'll call him Peter. Peter was a friend of a friend who'd hit hard times. He'd spent most of his working life with a big chain of department stores. Every month, in the belief that the money was safe, he'd paid into the company pension scheme. Now, faced with the company's abrupt descent into bankruptcy, he'd lost not only his job but – it seemed – all prospect of the pension to which he was entitled. He was 64 years old. For the rest of his life he'd be relying on whatever he could scrape up from the state. I was buying lunch.



We met at a pub in Old Portsmouth. Peter had made an effort to look disaster in the eye – bowls club blazer, crisp white shirt, Rotary tie – but the last couple of months had left an indelible mark. His face was pale and gaunt and there was a hint of deadness in his eyes. He'd been a buyer in the men's department. Everyone had known that trading was tough, and probably getting tougher, but no one had foreseen the coming disaster. It had happened so quickly. One day he was getting up and dressing for work, as usual. The next, he was desperately scanning the Jobs Vacant pages in the local rag, wondering whether he was too old to be working in a call-centre.

I felt very sorry for Peter, as anyone would. He'd played by the rules for his entire working life in the mistaken belief that either his company, or the pension fund which held all the contributions, would look after him in his old age. Now it turned out that every penny of those contributions had somehow been swallowed up. By the time the company declared itself bankrupt, the pension scheme was at least £14m in the red. Where had all that money gone? And how come he and other members of staff had no redress?

Peter had been in touch with pretty much everyone who might conceivably be able to help. His MP had been sympathetic but his hands were tied because the government, despite all their blather about helping out, didn't really want to know. Their Financial Assistance Scheme, which they claim to have capitalised at £2 billion, in fact amounted to a quarter of that figure. That £540m had to support around 10,000 pensioners of whom barely 400 had so far received any money at all. It was, said Peter, all smoke and mirrors. Politicians lied all the time. They'd say anything to get your vote but the moment they found themselves in power it was a very different story. Only last week, James Purnell, the Pensions Minister, had ruled out any further state help for the 125,000 people of working age – people like Peter – who'd lost their prospective retirement pot when their employers went bust.

We were still on the main course. Peter had barely touched his roast beef. I asked him how he felt about Mr Purnell. Peter lifted his head and looked me in the eye.

“Is that a serious question?”

“It is.”

“Then I’ll give you a serious answer. I’d like to kill him.”

I nodded. I understood. I could feel his anger. For once, it wasn’t necessary to make a note.

That evening, still in Pompey, I had a couple of beers with an old mate. His name was Tim Peters and he made ends meet by offering professional coaching lessons on the indoor tennis courts beside the university. He’d also trained as an actor and I’d been flattered to have him in the recording studio to read the Faraday series for the audio versions. Tim had good connections in the city’s underworld and was on drinking terms with a number of guys who’d prospered in the cocaine biz but what made him fascinating company were his other connections on the sunnier side of the tracks.

Tim had just come back from Barcelona, where he’d been coaching a bunch of rich kids on clay courts while their mums went shopping. These were 12 and 13 year olds from the wealthier parts of Southsea and Tim’s responsibilities, for which he was well paid, extended to overseeing their accommodations. They were all housed in a kind of Portacabin near the clay courts. Tim had a bed in the corner and had been alarmed to discover what they got up to in the evening. Not sneaky visits to the bright lights round the corner but the private excitements of hard-core porn downloads on their smart phones.

Tim is hard to shock. He’s seen a great deal in a rich and busy life and there isn’t much that doesn’t amuse him but this was something different.

“These are just kids,” he said. “And the stuff they were watching was beyond belief. We’re talking horses, Alsations, horrible stuff. When I told them to pack it in they just laughed. I told their mums next days, told them to do something about it, get a grip, and you know what? They thought it was funny, too.”

We had another pint and changed the subject but that story stuck with me for a long time. In ways I still find hard to describe it seemed

utterly in keeping with the slow motion car crash over which New Labour appeared to be losing so little sleep. Guys like Peter facing the rest of his life on benefits. Little rich kids getting off on Alsatians fucking the arse off some bimbo. And guys like Jonathan Mallinder helping himself to millions and millions of windfall profits from the scrap yard down the road.

I'd decided by now that Mr Mallinder wouldn't survive beyond the book's opening pages. His family home would be up in London somewhere. During the week, as negotiations developed for the Gateway site, he'd be living in a rented house in Port Solent. Late one evening, a man with a gun would pay a visit and leave most of Mallinder's head splattered over the master bedroom wall. But who is this person with a gun? And what kind of debt has he (or she) come to settle?

I stayed in Pompey for nearly a week. Next day I was due to see a guy called Brett Rennolds. He'd appeared on the radar after another friend had told me he might be up for a conversation. This was a bright Pompey boy who'd had his problems at school, rebelled a bit, and later found himself working out his frustrations in the nether reaches of Outer Mongolia. On that first occasion he'd told me about the job he'd found for himself. He'd been a logistics manager in a mining encampment. The company he worked for were prospecting for gold and copper. Brett lived in a container, pretty much on his own, but month by month he'd come to understand a little of the Mongolian mentality.

"It's got to do with the wind," he told me. "And the silence. When I first got out there I was wound so tight I thought I'd explode. I was like a stick of TNT. I was so fucking *angry*. I was living with Rach and we both felt pretty much the same about the world we saw around us. No way would we ever have kids. Why not? Because everywhere we looked, it was just so *shitty*. People, attitudes, the materialism, the ignorance, the indifference to others, totally vile. And so off I went. To get my head back together."

It worked. Brett learned about Mongolian customs, about the way you look out for others, about the way you share. Above all he

learned about Mongolian time.

“The sun comes up and the sun goes down,” he told me. “So whatever happens, however tough it gets, you just wait. Every day’s a new start, a new opportunity. These people had very simple beliefs. They believed that things *will* happen. And you know what? They were right.”

A couple of years later, after that first meeting, Brett was running an organisation called DreamWall. In some respects it was recognisably the fruit of the mindset he’d brought back from the Gobi Desert: that anything is possible, and that everyone should *belong*.

The project was shaped for kids who were in some kind of trouble. Brett and his team took them on four day residential programmes out on the edges of the New Forest and showed them a glimpse or two of the person they really wanted to be. These were kids from broken homes, kids in care, kids who’d never known their blood father or mother, kids who’d put up the shutters and turned away, kids – I thought to myself – like Doodie. Most of them were referrals from Social Services and it was Brett’s job, or maybe mission, to sort them out.

He talked about the games they played in the gym, pretending rubber mats were ice floes, getting them to mastermind a collective escape from the marauding killer whales. He described the importance of decent food, freshly sourced, properly cooked, of eating around a table, of waiting for others for once in their young lives. He told me about nights out in the New Forest, self-scripted talent shows around the camp fire, games of sneaky-beaky hide ‘n seek scored for laser beams and fake owl hoots.

Four days, he admitted, might sound like fuck-all time but the truth was that those precious four days could make all the difference in the world to kids like these and he had the evidence to prove it.

“These kids want a piece of us,” he said. “It’s nothing material, nothing you can sell, nothing you can big yourself up about. What it boils down to is laughter, and commitment, and doing stuff, and being part of something bigger than yourself. These are kids who only ever wanted to fight you. They have no attention span. No belief in

anything. Yet we can get them to change because we give a shit and they know it. They've never had that before. Never. That's just how fucking bad it's been."

I came away from that conversation a little changed myself, knowing that I'd found the kind of guy I was looking for, the kind of guy who – pushed to the absolute limit - might take a 44mm automatic and blow Mallinder's face off. His name would be Charlie Freeth. He'd be an ex-copper. It would be the work of my plot to crank up the pressures around him. And towards the end of the book he'd voice a little of what I'd just heard.

Freeth is in the interview suite. D/C Dawn Ellis and D/C Bev Yates are asking the questions.

*"You never had kids of your own, Charlie." He murmured. "How come?" Freeth's eyes found Yates. Then Ellis.*

*"You wouldn't." He said at length. "Not in this world, you wouldn't. Not in this fucking country, the way it is, the way it's heading. We've lost it, totally blown it, and if we're talking evidence I can give you a hundred names, a thousand, and all of them kids. Kids from broken homes. Kids from the wrong side of the tracks. Kids who never asked to be born. Kids who find themselves up to their necks in the fucking swamp we've made for them. No order. No routine. No direction. Not the first bloody clue who they are. And you know why they end up that way? Because we've failed them. Totally. Because we're gutless. Because we've let ourselves become obsessed by money, and gain, and all the other shit. Because we've given up on decency, and graft, and listening to each other, and trying to make an honest living. Because we lie on our backs and spread our legs and let a queue of arseholes have their way. Kids know that. They see it every day. And that's important because the people who get really fucked are them, not us. In our sad little lives, we think we can take care of it. Kids can't. Won't. And you know what? I'm not sure I blame them."*

*There was a long silence. Suttle, watching the video feed next door, mimed applause. Then Ellis bent forward.*

*“Arseholes like Mallinder?” She queried. “Arseholes like the minister who wouldn’t do right by Frank?”*

*Freeth looked her in the eye. A ghost of a smile came and went. “No comment.” He said softly.*

A couple of days later, still in Pompey, I fixed to meet another detective who plays an important part in this story. His name is Rich John and at the time I first met him he was a D/I working in the headquarters office of the Assistant Chief Constable for CID and Special Operations, Colin Smith. Colin had been a long-term fan of the Faraday books, and a source of all kinds of information. He lived up in Cowplain and he’d drive down for meets in pubs around Old Portsmouth, often with Rich in tow. All three of us became mates, and that friendship – I’m very glad to say – has survived.

Rich is a very bright guy. He’s also a little exotic for a serving policeman. His respective parents were Grenadian and Irish and it shows. My guess is that he had to try a little harder than the average copper to make his way through the ranks, and as a result he’s great company, a lovely mix of charm and a laid-back caniness that masks an acute intelligence.

I needed to talk to Rich about undercover work because by now I knew it was time for Winter to give up on the Men in Blue and make his way across to the Dark Side. That would be a journey fraught with danger on Winter’s part. It would also present me with a series of plot challenges which I’d have to resolve.

Rich, I suspected, knew a great deal about going undercover. So what did it entail? What were the risks? And what, most important of all, did it *feel* like?

We met in our usual pub, the Dolphin in Old Portsmouth. Rich, for once, seemed to have lost some of his spark. I asked what was wrong.

“The bullshit gets worse and worse,” he said. “This month’s catchphrase is “Delivering Citizen Focus”. I think that means talking to the locals. Big deal.”

I laughed. Back in uniform in Colin Smith’s office, I think he was

missing the cut and thrust of CID. He wanted to know about the next book. I said I was thinking of sending Paul Winter under cover to join up with Bazza Mackenzie and I needed a bit of a steer about one or two details. Any chance?

Rich, as ever, was generous enough to be candid. I think he shared Colin's belief that it was better trusting guys like me with the truth rather than have all kinds of implausible crap appearing on the page. U/c work, he said, could be seriously demanding. You had to know how to become someone else. You had to develop your legend, or story, and remember every part of it. You had to be alert to traps or inconsistencies every second of your waking life. For most u/c officers, this would be your first real look at a world you'd only ever seen over a table in the interview suite or from the back of an armoured Transit van. You were suddenly around guys for whom the only currency that ever mattered was respect. And what made the job even tougher was the fact that you were probably doing two or three other jobs at the same time.

"You mean u/c jobs?"

"Yeah."

"Being three other different people?"

"Yeah."

"Shit."

"Exactly."

The burn-out rate, said Rich, was high, an occupational hazard amongst u/c officers. Some chucked it in because they couldn't hack it any more. Some quit because they were convinced they were going to get themselves killed. Others turned native, joining the bad guys for real.

This was interesting. This was what I had in mind for Winter. Rich wanted to know how I was going to make that credible. Why would Winter turn his back on the Job? Why would he join Bad Baz?

"Because you guys fuck up all the time," I suggested.

"You're kidding me." Rich's smile suggested that was plausible.

"And because you nearly get him killed."

"Really?" The smile had gone. "How?"

I spent the rest of the evening explaining. By the time we left the pub Rich agreed my little wheeze would work. Back in Devon, I tried out the book's opening. This is what I wrote.

*Monday 4<sup>th</sup> September, 2006. Cambados, Spain.*

*Uncomfortable in the heat, Winter followed the funeral cortege as it wound up the path towards the cemetery. From here, high on the rocky hillside, he could sense what had drawn the dead man to Cambados. Not simply the lure of Colombian cocaine, delivered wholesale across the Atlantic. Not just the prospect of ever-swelling profits as he helped the laughing powder towards the exploding UK marketplace. But the chance to settle somewhere remote, somewhere real, to make a life for himself amongst these tough, nut-brown Galician peasants.*

*The cortege came to a halt beside the ruins of the Santa Marina church while the priest fumbled with the gate of the cemetery. Winter paused, glad to catch his breath. The view was sensational. Immediately below, a tumble of houses crowding towards the waterfront. Further out, beyond the estuary, the acheing blueness of the open sea.*

*Last night, after an emotional tour of his brother's favourite bars, Bazza had ended up locked in an embrace with Mark's girlfriend's mother. Her name was Teresa. She was a plump, handsome woman who walked with the aid of a stick and as far as Winter understood, the funeral arrangements had been entirely her doing.*

*The priest had accepted her assurances that Mark had been a practising catholic. The friends he'd made had secured a plot in the cemetery. God had doubtless had a hand in the jet-ski accident, and Mark's death doubtless served some greater purpose, but the only thing she understood just now was that her daughter's life would never be the same. Bebe had been only months away from becoming Mark's wife. There would have been children, lots of children. God gives, and God takes away, she'd muttered, burying her face in a fold of Bazza's linen jacket.*



*The mourners began to shuffle upwards again, and Winter caught a whiff of something sweet, carried on the wind. Beside him, still hungover, was a lifelong friend of Bazza's, a survivor from the glory days of the Eighties. The last time Winter had seen him was in court, a couple of years back. He'd been up on a supply charge, coupled with accusations of GBH, and had walked free after a key witness had changed his mind about giving evidence. Last night, by barely ten, he'd been legless.*

*"What's that, mush?" He had his nose in the air.*

*"Incense." Winter paused again, mopping his face. "Gets rid of bad smells."*

*Late evening, the same day, Winter was drinking alone at an empty table outside a bar on the waterfront. The bar belonged to Teresa. According to Bazza, she'd won it as part of a divorce settlement from her husband, an ex-pro footballer, and for old times sake it was still called the Bar del Portero, the keeper's bar. Winter had been here a lot over the last couple of days, enjoying the swirl of fishermen, and high-season tourists, conscious of the black-draped photos of Mark amongst the gallery of faces from the goalie's past.*

*Tonight, though, was different. Bazza and his entourage had disappeared to a restaurant and to be honest Winter was glad of an hour or two on his own.*

*The first he knew about company was a hand on his shoulder, the lightest touch. He looked up to find a tall, slim Latino helping himself to the other chair. He was older than he looked. He had the hands of a man in his forties, and there were threads of grey in his plaited hair. The white T-shirt carried a faded image of Jimmy Hendrix.*

*"You're a cop." He said.*

*"Yeah?"*

*"Si."*

*"Who says?"*

*"Me. I know cops. I know cops all my life. You tell me it's not true?"*

*"I'm telling you nothing. Except it's none of your fucking business."*

*There was a long silence. The Latino produced a mobile and checked for messages. Then he returned the mobile to his jeans pocket, tipped his head back against the chair, and stared up into the night sky.*

*"We're wasting time, you and me, Senor Winter. I know who you are. I know where you come from. I know...." He shrugged, leaving the sentence unfinished.*

*Winter leaned forward, irritated, pushing his glass to one side.*

*"So why bother checking? Why all this drama?"*

*"Because we need to talk."*

*"About what?"*

*"About you."*

*"Yeah?"*

*"Si...you want to tell me what you're doing here? In Cambados?"*

*"Not especially."*

*"You're a friend of Senor Mackenzie."*

*"That's right."*

*"And you've come over because of his brother."*

*"Yeah."*

*"Because you and Senor Mackenzie are..." he frowned, "... friends."*

*"Spot-on, son. Bazza and me go back a while. And it happens you're right. I am a cop. Or was. I'm also a mate of Bazza's. A family friend. Here to support the lad. Here to help. Here to do my bit."*

*"But cops never stop being cops. And that could be a problem."*

*"Yeah?"*

*"Si." His gaze had settled on Winter's face. "I have a question for you, Mr Winter. It's a very simple question. As it happens, I know about your friends, about Senor Mackenzie, and I know about you. This man is a cop, I tell them. It's all over his face, the way he talks, the way he moves, his eyes, who he watches, how he watches, everything. Sure, they tell me. The man's a cop. And a good cop. A good cop turned bad. But clever. Useful. Me? I tell them they're crazy. Loco. And wrong, too. Why? Because like I say cops never stop being cops. Never. Nunca. Not here, in Spain. Not in my*

country. Not in yours. Nunca. Whatever they say. Nunca.”

“And the question?”

“Tell me why you’re really here.”

“You’d never believe me.”

“I might.”

“OK. And if you don’t?”

“It will be bad, very bad. For you. And maybe for us, also.”

“How bad is very bad?”

“The worst.” He smiled. “Lo peor.”

Winter took his time digesting the news. Bazza had pointed out this man twice in the last couple of days, once pissed, once sober. His name was Riquelme, though everyone seemed to call him Rikki. He was Colombian. He was said to hold court in a four-star hotel along the coast. Not a gram of cocaine came into Cambados without his say-so.

Rikki was still waiting for an answer to his question. Winter swallowed a mouthful of lukewarm lager and glanced at his watch. Conversations like this he didn’t need.

“I’m fifty in a year or two...” he looked up, “...and you know the present I’ve always promised myself? Retirement. No more fannying around. No more working my arse off for people trying to stitch me up. No more chasing braindead junkies around. But you know something about my line of work? It doesn’t pay. Not the kind of money I’m going to need. So what do I do? I look for someone who might take me seriously for once. And for someone who might understand what I’m really worth. Happens I’ve found that someone. And that someone, just now, needs a bit of support. Comprende?”

Winter waited for some kind of response. The Colombian studied him for a moment or two, then produced a thin cheroot.

“Bullshit.” He said softly.

A bit like *Deadlight*, this single scene on the waterfront – as far as the fate of Winter is concerned - holds the secret to the entire book. Willard, stung by the catastrophic collapse of Operation *Tumbril*, has put Winter into play against Bazza Mackenzie. His legend, the set of

circumstances that explain his expulsion from the force, involve four pints of Stella and a traffic car tucked round the side of the pub, ready to nab Pompey's maverick detective the moment he gets behind the wheel.

In a scene that never made it to the book, Winter asks Willard what role he's supposed to be playing as far as Mackenzie is concerned.

*"You're fat, you're old, you're washed up, and you're fucking bitter about the woollies nicking you on the DUI charge. We took what we wanted and once you became a serious pain, in fact a fucking liability, we threw you out." Willard offered a thin smile. "How does that sound?"*

Now on Bazza's pay roll, Winter is tasked to organise a high profile tribute event to mark the passing of Bazza's half-brother, killed off Cambados in a jet-ski accident. Winter knows nothing about jet-skis or media rights but is a quick study. He's busy putting together Pompey's first Jet-Ski Grand Prix when a Devon and Cornwall operation seizes a big consignment of cocaine, imported from Colombia first through Cambados, and then through Pompey's Ferry port. Hantspol had known of this operation for a while but no one had thought to warn Winter.

Early the next morning, Mackenzie turns up at Winter's apartment, convinced his new recruit lay behind the drugs bust. With him is his scary enforcer, ex-pro footballer Brett West.

*"You're a disgrace." Mackenzie said. "And you're a fucking grass."*

*"You're right, Baz, I am a disgrace. I'm a bent copper. And I was silly enough to believe all those promises you made."*

*"Me?"*

*"Yeah. All the stuff about coming on board, about going legit, about the stuff we could do together, about opportunities. But it's not about that at all, is it? It's about you being as bent and paranoiac as ever. Me? I should never have got involved. Not if I wanted to avoid*

*drivel like this."*

*Winter tightened the belt on his dressing gown. He hadn't taken his eyes off Mackenzie for a second. By the window, West stirred.*

*"The cunt's lying." He said.*

*Mackenzie wasn't so sure. Winter could sense his uncertainty.*

*"If you've got this right..." he said to Mackenzie, "...then you're talking big time u/c, covert operations, the lot. I can see why you might think that. I can see where this phone call you got from Rikki might have led. You think I've stitched you up. You think I'm part of some monster fucking plan to worm my way into the organisation, to nose around, to find out where the bodies are buried. If all that was true, then one of the things I've got to maintain is my cover. Right?"*

*Mackenzie nodded, said nothing.*

*"So if that's true, if that's the case, if that's the way it happens in real life, then what the fuck am I doing pulling a stroke like Cambados? Knowing full well you'll find out? Is that some clever double bluff? Or might you just be looking at the wrong bloke? Go on, Baz, do yourself a favour, work it out. Of course I'm bent. I wouldn't be here if I wasn't. But I'm not stupid. Or at least not that stupid."*

*Mackenzie was frowning now. He looked away for a moment, avoiding Westie's glare.*

*"You're a clever fucker" he said softly, "I grant you that."*

Writing a scene like this, with Winter desperately toeing the line between survival and something infinitely more horrible, convinced me that I was on track. A scene shortly afterwards confirmed it, fatefully clearing the path that Winter would tread for the rest of the series.

Slipping the surveillance that Bazza has put in place, Winter takes the train to Bournemouth where DCI Gail Parsons is waiting in a borrowed office at Bournemouth General Hospital to de-brief him. In the wake of the Devon and Cornwall operation, she says, Det Supt Willard has made a decision.

*"He believes that this business last week, the cocaine seizure, has*

changed the scenario. To put it bluntly, he believes you may be at risk."

"I've been at risk from the start."

"More at risk."

"He wants to withdraw me? Abort the whole thing? Only that could be tricky. In fact that would leave me completely in the shit. What do I tell Bazza? That I've got a headache? That the money's crap? That I'm really a copper? Do me a favour, boss. This is like the cocaine thing all over again. In fact it's worse. Those guys know where I live. They'd nail me to the floor."

"That's exactly the point."

"What's the point?"

Parsons studied him for a long moment. Then she pushed the notepad to one side.

"I have to be frank. We've done a full risk assessment. It's late in the day, I admit, but at least we've got to grips with it."

"Who's 'we'?"

"Myself and Mr Willard. There's no question of pulling you out, not at this point in the operation, not unless you insist, and of course that's absolutely your right, but whatever happens we're obliged to offer you resettlement."

"You what?" Winter was staring at her now. "Resettlement?"

"Exactly. We'll make sure you have the whole package, of course. New ID, new passport, new documentation, new address. Full pension."

"Pension?"

"Yes."

"Where?"

"You'd have a choice. Canada, New Zealand, or Australia. We'd pay all relocation expenses plus we'd find you suitable accommodation until you'd had a chance to find your feet."

"And then?"

"We'd contribute to the capital cost of a house or a flat, whatever you chose. There'd be adjustments, of course, depending on your own financial circumstances, once you'd sold your own place." She

reached for the pad again, and picked up the pencil. "Gunwharf, isn't it?"

Winter ignored the question. He was still absorbing the implications of this bombshell.

"The full makeover, then. A new me. Put out to grass." The phrase made him laugh.

Parsons didn't see the joke. "Absolutely." She nodded. "Mr Willard and I both agree it's an appropriate outcome."

"And what if I say no?"

"Then we'd have to look at other pathways forward."

"Like what?"

"Like a transfer to another force."

"In the UK?"

"It's possible."

"But not Pompey?"

"No."

"So there's no way I can get back to the job? Like he promised?"

"I'm afraid not. Not the way things have panned out. It's for the best, Paul, believe me."

There was a long silence. Winter could hear the clatter of a trolley in the corridor outside. At length, Parsons adjusted the collar of the white coat she must have borrowed. Winter felt like asking her for an aspirin.

"I'm fucked." He said softly.

"Paul, I'm not hearing this."

"No?" He gazed at her, robbed of anything coherent to say. Two weeks undercover. A fortnight on the hardest job he'd ever been asked to sort out. Moments when he was certain they'd sussed him. Moments when he knew he'd be lucky to get away with a beating. And now this. Fucked. Re-bottled. Re-labelled. Stuffed on a plane and exported to the other side of the world. He shook his head. Looked away. There were tears in his eyes. He didn't want her to see them.

"Naturally, we don't expect a response immediately, certainly not this afternoon..." Parsons glanced at her watch, "...but we'd appreciate some kind of decision soon. Maybe in a couple of days.

*Would that be asking too much?"*

*Winter was still gazing into nowhere. There were two things he held precious in his life. One was the job. The other was Pompey. And here they were. Both gone. He tipped his head back a moment, gazing up at the ceiling. He had to get a grip. Now, above all, he had to make-believe.*

*"I appreciate it, boss." He gave her a smile. "It's nice to know you've thought this thing through."*

From this point onward, Paul Winter will never be a policeman again. Neither Willard nor Parsons know it, but his way back to the job he'd loved is blocked. Under these circumstances, he has no choice but to join Bazza for real, stepping carefully round the countless traps that lie ahead. As the plot unfolds, he once again comes very close to getting himself killed but finally manages to convince Bazza that his passage to the Dark Side is 100% kosher. There follows a scene that was a joy to write and confirmed my gut feeling that Winter had ended up in high-octane company.

The two men are celebrating in a Southsea club. Mackenzie has just made a joke.

*Winter laughed. On the strength of tonight, he'd bought a second bottle of champagne, another forty quid that prompted Bazza to ask what the fuck they were celebrating.*

*"Nothing, Baz, just this." Winter had waved vaguely at the space between them. "You get to an age, you know that?"*

*"Get to an age what, mush?" he was genuinely interested. Winter could see it in his eyes.*

*"An age when stuff starts sorting itself out. You're way too young, Baz, you won't have a clue what I'm talking about. And between you and me, I'm far too pissed to explain. Except it's nothing but good news. Drink to that?"*

*They had. And the second bottle, with a wave of Winter's credit card, had given way to a third. Now, with the crowd at the bar beginning to thin, Bazza suggested an expedition to Misty Gallagher's.*



*"It's two in the fucking morning, Baz."*

*"Doesn't matter. She's an owl, that woman. Be a laugh."*

*He ordered a cab. It was waiting at the kerb within minutes. At the top of the island, where the motorway divides, Bazza told the cabbie to take the left fork.*

*"Port Solent, mush." He gave him an address.*

*The cabbie laughed. "Lottery win, is it?"*

*"Fuck off."*

*The escort agency lay in the genteel clutter of £400,000 houses fringing the marina. Telling the cabbie to wait, Bazza steered Winter up the front path. The woman who opened the door recognised Mackenzie at once.*

*"You should have phoned earlier, Baz. She's busy right now."*

*"Doesn't matter, love. It's my mate here. We're talking an all-nighter. What have you got left?"*

*"Has he got a tongue in his head, your mate?" The woman was eyeing Winter. "Only he can choose for himself, can't he?"*

*Inside, Winter found his way to an over-furnished lounge. Three girls were sprawled in various states of undress, watching a DVD. It was unbearably hot.*

*Bazza nodded at them. "Freebie, mate. Call it a thank you. Help yourself."*

*Winter took his time. All three girls ignored him. Finally, he chose a shapely blond with dead eyes. She looked easily the oldest but even so, she could have been his daughter.*

*Bazza tapped her on the shoulder. "You got a name, love?"*

*"Dawn." She was chewing gum.*

*"Dawn, this is my mate Paul. I want you to be very nice to him. You listening to me?"*

*He disappeared from the room without waiting for an answer. Winter wanted more champagne. Badly. He nodded at the huge plasma screen.*

*"Like him do you, love? Tom Cruise?"*

*"It's Kevin Costner."*

*"Costner, then."*

*"I think he's a wanker."*

*"Really? Ever see Top Gun?"*

*"Top what?"*

*Bazza was back. He'd sorted a deal for the night and promised to have young Dawn back in time to get breakfast for her nipper.*

*"Nipper?" Winter was lost.*

*"Little girl. Dawn's mum stays over nights but she has to be at work by seven. Ain't that right, Dawn?"*

*Dawn wasn't paying attention. Bazza walked them all out to the cab. The three of them sat in the back with Dawn in the middle. Bazza had his arm round her. From time to time he nuzzled her ear and whispered something Winter couldn't catch. After a while, she started to scratch herself.*

*Winter leaned across, poked Bazza on the knee.*

*"She's a junkie." He said. "I can tell."*

*"No way, mush. I asked. It's just a habit. The girl gets nervous. Mist's got a fridge full of Moet. She'll warm up a treat."*

*Misty was in bed when they arrived. Winter caught sight of her in one of the upstairs windows, trying to check out the noise at the gate. Bazza paid off the cabbie and found the key to the front door. By the time they were inside, Misty was half way downstairs. The sight of Winter, the state of the man, put a smile on her face.*

*"Company, Mist. Paulie here's played a blinder, clever cunt that he is. Thought he deserved a little pressie. Say hallo, Dawn. Pretend you're a fucking human being."*

*Dawn ignored him. Misty, laughing now, took Winter by the hand.*

*"Are we up for a foursome?" She said to Mackenzie. "Or what?"*

*"Piss off, Mist." He grinned back at her. "You're the pressie."*

*I finished the first draft of *The Price of Darkness* with time to spare before the Orion deadline expired. A couple of days later news arrived that I'd made it from the Theakston's long list to the short list. This appeared to put me in the running for the UK's top crime prize. I phoned Simon. He didn't seem the least surprised.*

*"About time too," he said. "Fingers crossed, eh?"*

## Ten

In the end, sadly, the Theakston's prize didn't happen. I journeyed north to Harrogate for the crime-fest and shared the stage with the other half dozen contenders, all too aware that the next half hour could make a sizeable difference to both my sales and my national profile. After the difference of editorial opinion with Lisa Milton over *One Under*, I'd pretty much given up on the latter but nothing quickens ambition faster than the thought of piles of my paperbacks stickered with the Theakston's glad news, and for the hour it took for us to be group-interviewed before the magic envelope yielded a name, I'm ashamed to say I was drifting peaceably around in fantasy land. The prize that year went to Allan Guthrie, a gifted Scottish crime writer, and I went through exactly the same trial-by-shortlist the following year, though by then I was on better terms with disappointment. The '08 prize, incidentally, went to Stef Penny for *The Tenderness of Wolves*. Excellent book.

*The Price of Darkness*, though, definitely touched a nerve amongst the reviewers. James Urquhart, in the *Financial Times*, applauded D/C Winter's "tongue-in-cheek vitality" while the Toronto *Globe and Mail* wrote that "Hurley's graphically realistic Portsmouth is very similar to David Simon's amazing picture of an equally besieged Baltimore." To share a sentence with the creator of *The Wire* was a rich moment but there was even better to come from Laura Wilson, a fellow crime writer reviewing for the *Guardian*. She very definitely got it.

"Residents of Portsmouth disgruntled by Boris Johnson's description

of their town as drug-ridden and populated by obese under achievers will not necessarily be pleased to learn that it is the setting for Britain's finest and hardest-hitting series of police procedural novels. *The Price of Darkness* is Graham Hurley's best book yet and should put Pompey firmly on the literary map. Maverick D/C Paul Winter has gone under cover and is finding that the rich pickings of criminal life are too much of a burden for his slender conscience to bear while stalwart D/I Joe Faraday is trying to piece together a jigsaw of graft and corruption in order to solve a murder and an assassination. Hurley presents a world which has lost its moral compass, where selfishness, betrayal and brutality prevail, and the rare instances of decency and kindness seem almost aberrant. Readers who enjoy convincing, well-crafted thrillers won't go wrong with this one."

Reviews like this, precisely because they recognise the reef beneath the suck and flow of circumstance that takes the reader from page to page, are – in my experience – literally priceless. I'm not sure whether Laura Wilson ( or Mark Timlin, or Susanna Yager, or Margaret Cannon, or Michael Carlson) ever knew it, but the knowledge that reviewers – especially fellow writers – understood what Joe Faraday and I were really about went a long way towards sustaining my faith in the series. These books, I hope, were never going to be sociological essays, or political rants, but neither were they a bunch of cartoon characters in search of the fabled mass market. Page-turning, yes. Plot-driven, of course. But also stories with ample space for the kind of characters and situations that make you pause from time to time and have a bit of a wonder about where we're all heading.

So where next for the series? It was a Saturday in late April and my eye was caught by a full page story in the weekend's *Guardian*. The headline – *Police arrest girl whose MySpace site led to £20,000 party disaster* – gave you all the clues you'd ever need but the real potential was in the small print. This was a 17 year old "A" level student whose secret plans for a modest get-together went catastrophically wrong after the party's location was broadcast on MySpace.

The girl and her parents lived in a smart, new-looking house on a

private estate in County Durham. The photo in the *Guardian* showed a double garage, bay windows upstairs and down, plus an area of lawn out front. Mum and dad had gone away on a caravanning weekend, forbidding their daughter to have guests around, and returned to find the place trashed and the neighbours in shock. There was vomit, graffiti and urine in every room and homeowners from the rest of the cul-de-sac had spent half the night chasing hundreds of drunken teenagers around with golf clubs.

Some of these uninvited guests had come from as far away as London, blocking the mouth of the cul-de-sac with mini-buses and other vehicles, and the incident had required seven police cars and a dog unit before order was restored. Some of the kids, it seemed, were as young as 11, and had simply climbed in through a back window after the partying daughter and her friends had bolted the front door. Within days, reviews for the rave began to appear on social websites. 19 year old Emily from Newcastle was cock-a-hoop about a couple of boys she'd met. "I was on a field with one of these people," she reported. "And in a bedroom with the other. Haha stunners.x"

That same morning, more than intrigued, I did a bit of research on the internet and turned up a press release from a major insurance company. Specially commissioned research had established that British teens had run up a £136 million bill in damages in partying while their parents were away. Carpets, sofas, curtains were the first to fall victim to the tidal wave of Scrumpy Jack, discount vodka, cheap wine, plus a selection of body fluids, and the damage got to battleground proportions once the gatecrashers arrived. In some respects it would have been nice to interpret all this mayhem as episodes in some on-going class war, a cheerful weekend settling of accounts, but this analysis would have been wrong. The kids kept an eye on the social websites, turned up, got pissed, and wrecked everything. Next day, on FaceBook or MySpace, the comment that cropped up most often was "lol". "Lol" means "Laugh out loud."

I read the press release again to make sure I had the facts right. Then I realised that the insurance company that had commissioned all

this research was Zurich. People like me never discount the power of co-incidence. The UK headquarters of Zurich plc, a slightly sinister office block clad in black glass, lay in the middle of Pompey, just a mile from where I was sitting. I looked for something to write on. It's rare to get a whole novel on the back of a petrol receipt. This is what I wrote: *Bazza's next door neighbour. Gone away. Bazza house-sitting. Chaos. Or worse.*

Where next? John Ashworth was the obvious place to start. He'd recently left the Major Crime Team and was now working as the managing D/I in the Department of Scientific Services at Hantspol's Training HQ, a sprawling complex in the grounds of an old mental asylum at Netley, near Southampton Water. John's new empire housed the guys responsible for comms analysis, video and stills recording, plus a unit of high-tech crime busters. John also had access to the Fingerprint Bureau, the Chemical Treatment Unit, and something called Forensic Intelligence Research.

These are the crown jewels in terms of what investigators call "passive data", crime-fighting tools which increasingly underpin successful convictions.

The problem for outsiders like yours truly is that these techniques are state of the art and in the process of constant change. Keeping abreast with stuff like this can be a nightmare with a readership only too eager to spot the smallest technical mistake, and so I'd been ear bashing John for a series of in-depth briefings. These he was in the process of arranging when I phoned next day.

"I'm on it, mate. No problem. I'm lining them all up. You'll need a couple of days. You can stay over if you want. You can have the spare room. I'll kick the dogs out."

I said that was kind of him. His plan to blitz the interviews sounded perfect. I also had something else in mind.

"What's that?"

"Can't say. Except you'll love it."

John adores withheld information. It means I've learned a thing about CID. It means we're talking the same language, playing the same covert game.

“Gizza clue.”

“Just one. Right?”

“Go on.”

“Kids. Millions of them. Trillions of them. All totally out of it.”

“Fuck. Nightmare.”

“Exactly.”

We met the following week for a brainstorm. John had enlisted his boss, an engaging guy called Terry Lowe who was Deputy Head of Scientific Services. Terry is a bit of a jogger. He’s small and lean and he has what casting directors occasionally call “presence”. He’s quick on his feet, and has an engaging habit of attacking every problem from the least expected angle. The news that he was shortly to feature in a Channel Four documentary series about major crime investigations was no surprise.

He and John wanted to know what I was up to. I explained about the party in the house next door to Bazza. This is leafy Craneswater, as posh as Pompey ever gets. It’s Saturday night, the parents are away, and the daughter pings out some invites on her Facebook page. A little get-together round my place. Bring a bottle. Or maybe two.

Terry Lowe, as I quickly discovered, preferred questions and answers to any form of speech-making. Very Socratic.

“This girl’s at school, right?”

“Right.”

“PGS?”

“Spot on.”

“What age?”

“Seventeen.”

“Perfect.” Terry nodded in approval. PGS is Portsmouth Grammar School, educational institution of choice for aspirational Pompey parents.

John wanted to know where the parents had gone.

“They’re away on vacation. The guy’s nuts about crossing big oceans on big yachts. He and his wife have signed up for the sail of a lifetime. Just now they’re in the middle of the Pacific.”

"Minted, then."

"Yeah."

"So what does he do for a living, this guy?"

"He's a Crown Court judge."

"And he's living next door to Bazza?"

"Exactly. And guess what, they're best mates. The judge obviously knows a bit about Bazza but he thinks it's kind of exotic and amusing. The wives get on really well. So when Baz offers to keep an eye on young Rach, just to make sure everything stays sweet, the judge says yes please "

"And means it?"

"Yeah."

"Nice one."

The notion of Pompey's top face tucked up next door to a High Court judge had drawn a grin from Terry, too. Like John, he knew the series backwards.

"So what happens?" This from Terry.

I explained that the invite on Rachel's Facebook page has leaked into the rougher quarters of Pompey. Young Rachel has history with Matt Berriman, a top swimmer from one of these areas, though the new beau for whom she'd throwing the party – a PGS boy her age called Gareth Hughes - comes from safer social stock.

"So what happens?" Terry asked again.

"The party kicks off, just like Rachel intended, then half of Somerstown turns up. Hundreds of kids. Rachel's place is swamped. She's got no chance. These kids have been pissed for hours. They're out of their heads on Carling Export and whatever else they can neck. Think Lacoste. Think Stone Island. Think lippy thirteen year olds. Think attitude. Bloodbath. Total chav fest."

"Bloodbath?" John's was getting seriously interested. Somerstown, though barely a mile from Rachel's place, is on a different planet to Craneswater.

I explained that neighbours Bazza and Marie are returning from an evening with friends. When they make it back to Sandown Road the judge's house is heaving with pissed adolescents. They're at every



window. You can hear the music from the Isle of Wight. The kids are wrecking the place. Bazza leaps out of the car, wades in through the judge's front door, and takes a beating. Marie calls the police and pulls her husband out. She walks him along the road to next door where they live. Beside the pool they find two bodies.

"Dead?"

"Yeah."

"Killed?"

"Definitely. One's been stabbed. The other one's got blood coming out of his right ear."

"Kids?"

"Yeah."

"Do we know them?"

"We do."

I'm looking at John. John glances at Terry.

"Rachel," Terry says. "And the boy Gareth. Has to be."

Spot-on. The police arrive in time for Marie to give them the news about the bodies. I want Bazza arrested for suss murder and I want to know what happens next about the party house.

Terry's gone very quiet. He appears to be counting on his fingers. Finally he looks up.

"We're talking multiple crime scenes," he says. "How many kids at the party?"

"Hundreds."

"That's not an answer."

"Two hundred and seventeen."

"Right. So we've got two bodies from the party. That's Crimes Scenes One and Two. We've got the pool area, that's Three. Then the road outside, that's Four. Next door, we've got 217 scrote piss-heads. That makes two hundred and twenty one potential crime scenes. Plus the judge's house, and the garden and all the rest of it. Can't happen, mate. Totally impossible."

"But it has happened, Terry."

I'd anticipated this. I passed him the cutting from the *Guardian*. He glanced at the headline and looked briefly pained. Then he shook his

head.

“Doesn’t work,” he repeated. “Wouldn’t ever happen.”

“It’s there in front of you.”

“I know.”

“You’re in denial, Terry. We’re talking the event, the incident, not what happens afterwards. This is Pompey, remember. I’m amazed something like this hasn’t kicked off already.”

“Sure. For all I know you might be right. All I’m saying is we couldn’t handle it. No way.”

John wasn’t convinced. He wanted to talk the thing through, imagine a situation like that for real. First off, the scene beside the pool obviously needed to be secured. That meant uniforms plus Scenes of Crime plus a HOP.

“HOP?”

“Home Office Pathologist. The hot one just now is Debbie Cook. She’d have to drive over from North Devon. We’re talking three hours.”

“How about Bazza?”

“We’d scoop him up and book him in. His missus, too. Prime suspects, have to be.”

“Why?”

“Number one he’s known to us already. Number two the murders have taken place on his property. We haven’t got a clue why he’d want to kill either of them but at this stage we only have his word that he’s only just arrived. We need to seize his motor, bag his clothes, bosh the house, alibi him properly, check it all out. Has to be done.”

“What about next door? The party?”

“We’d have uniforms there by then. Probably the duty Inspector, too. He’d put the shout out for the FSU.”

The FSU is police-speak for the Force Support Unit. I’d met these guys before. These are the scary Ninjas who turn up in full body armour. They work in shield pairs and spend the happiest of days in the force gym rehearsing every scenario you can imagine until they’ve calibrated exactly the right degree of violence to terrify everyone into submission. They also use dogs. The fact that they call them “Land

Sharks” might give you pause for thought.

The FSU would turn up within the hour, said John, and risk assess the situation.

“What does that mean?”

“They obviously need to close the party down. No way are these kids all going to form an orderly queue at the door, not in this scenario, so my guess is they’re going to go for controlled release. Everyone’s pissed, hostile, coked –up, whatever, so quick-time they need to start negotiating.”

Terry was giving John the benefit of the doubt. Say 75% of the kids could be coaxed into leaving the party in batches. That would still leave a hard core of 50+ inbreds for the FSU to sort out but in the meantime the Crime Scene Coordinator would be faced with the prospect of arresting the other 167. Any of these kids could have been implicated in the double murder next door. They’d need transport from Craneswater to various custody centres – ideally in coaches that had been forensically cleaned beforehand to prevent cross contamination. The kids’ mobiles would have to be seized for analysis. In each case that raised issues about a warrant for the intercept of communications. This process alone, an application for the so-called RIPA (named after the Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act), could take hours.

At the custody centres, each of these potential suspects would need legal representation. Their kit would be seized for forensic analysis. They’d all be fingerprinted, gob-swabbed and photographed. Anyone under 16 – dozens probably – would require the presence of an appropriate adult. Two hundred and seventeen interviews would need dozens of two-person interviewing teams, each feeding intel back to the crime scene. In resource terms alone, it would be an impossible ask.

“Sure,” I said. “But it has to happen.”

“OK,” He nodded. The fingers again. “Number one we don’t have enough custody centres in the force. Or enough cells. So number two, we’ve got an Assistant Chief Constable on the phone ringing everyone he can think of. Thames Valley. West Sussex. East Dorset. Surrey. The Met. Wherever. And number three, it’s

Saturday night, right?"

"Right."

"So it's already as busy as fuck which means the word has to go out force-wide telling everyone to lay off."

"Lay off what?"

"Arresting people. All that has to stop. Why? Because we're gonna need every cell, every custody skipper, every interviewing detective, every exhibit bag, we can lay hands on."

"All for one party?"

"Exactly. And it doesn't end there. This operation goes on through the night. Has to. There's something called the Working Hours Directive. It's pure Euro-bollocks but we have to stick with it. Pretty soon our guys are going to be off the clock. We have to find reinforcements. That might not be possible." He nodded grimly. All this grief. Just for one party.

"So what happens if two more parties like this kick off on the same night? Pure co-incidence? One in Southampton? One in Aldershot?"

"We'd be stuffed."

"But you're saying you're stuffed already."

"You're right, my friend. I kid you not. You're looking at the thin blue line."

The debate went on for a couple of hours. Some kind of triage arrangement at the interview suites, deciding which kids to down-prioritise. How to get defence lawyers to represent multi-clients. How best to ping evidential scenes of crime images from the party house to the interview teams working in custody suites across the south of England. Who might boss the POLSA search of the darkened garden for dumped phones. Technical issues about the forensic treatment of the judge's house ("you're talking a week's work at least"). How best to manage the ever-lengthening queue for phone analysis. And just how big a hole this single incident would leave in the force budget.

The latter question pre-occupied Terry Lowe more than any other, not least because it was one of his real-life responsibilities. At £265 a pop for each submitted Crime Scene stain, or £2000 for a 24-hr turnaround on a full DNA profile, the forensic costs alone were

terrifying. Add in all the other factors, including overtime, and you were probably looking at six figures. Easily.

As you might imagine, all this stuff was priceless grist for my fictional mill. Over the following couple of days, I visited all the outposts of the Hantspol forensic empire, hunting for the little details that I could sprinkle over the developing narrative. Why the pathologist on-site would cover the victim's head, hands and feet in clear polythene bags before removal of the body. How the national data base of trainer treads could offer a key line of enquiry after the retrieval of stamp marks at post-mortem.

By the weekend, back in Devon, I was looking at nearly a hundred pages of scribbled notes, but what stuck in my mind above all was the truth I appear to have teased from Terry Lowe: that the space between society and lawlessness, between order and anarchy, was infinitely smaller than I – or maybe anyone else – had ever imagined. I knew it was important to somehow voice this, to find the right time and the right setting in the developing narrative to let people have just a glimpse of this scary secret.

The answer lay with Det Chief Supt Geoff Willard, Hantspol's fictional Head of CID. On the Sunday morning, in the immediate aftermath of the party, with the double murder making the national news, Willard faces a young reporter on live TV.

*The shot widened to discover Willard by her side. His tinted lenses had darkened in the bright sunshine, emphasising the pallor of his skin. Ignoring the reporter's question, he took issue at once with her use of the word "looting". Looting, he said, was associated with natural disasters, with earthquakes, with floods. This was something totally different, something man-made. Many of the young people at last night's party appeared not to have been invited. That raised issues of trespass, of house-breaking, of criminal damage, possibly of theft. Add the tragic deaths she'd already mentioned, and the implications were profoundly disturbing. Not just for the friends and family of the victims. But for all of us.*

*Scenting a headline, the reporter asked him to explain why. Given*

*an invitation like this, Willard couldn't help himself. He was on live television. On a Sunday morning, half of suburban Britain would probably be tuned in. Fighting the temptation to turn directly to the camera, he tallied the real damage these young people had done. Two needless deaths was bad enough but what people might live to remember was the spectacle of an entire city left virtually unpoliced while officers did their best to deal with a bunch of partying thugs.*

*These people, in his view, were the tip of a very dangerous iceberg. What we'd seen last night was near-anarchy. Only patient police work – and a huge amount of money – had restored some semblance of law and order. As it was, force resources had been stretched to breaking point. Any more parties like that, and good people, decent people, might find themselves living under a state of siege.*

*The frankness of his admission surprised even Winter. He looked round the apartment. Was it time to change the locks on the front door? Buy himself a Rottweiler? Borrow some of Bazza's more inventive heavies? He turned back to the TV but Willard had said his piece and the smile on the reporter's face told Winter she'd got her scoop. Top Cop Warns Of Anarchy. Kids Rule, OK?*

The following month, I was back in Pompey. By now, I'd mapped out the broad sequence of events that would fuel the plot. One area where I needed additional help lay in the hordes of mid-teen tearaways that would invite themselves to Rachel's little soiree. Putting flesh on young Doodie in *Angels Passing* and meeting Brett Rennolds for *The Price of Darkness* had given me all kinds of clues, but the real door I wanted to open belonged to the city's Preventing Youth Offending Project, a decidedly unsnappy title for a couple of guys who knew Pompey youth culture on intimate terms.

The manager was a social worker, Bruce Marr, who was more than generous with his time. He gave me an overview of the challenges thrown up by a mix of educational failure, family breakdown, and the uncontested chokehold that fashion, booze and violence seemed to have secured on large swathes of what copper's

call the nighttime economy.

Growing up, in Bruce's view, had become a complex proposition. Many kids had swapped any kind of home life for a kind of tribal loyalty to their mates. This bred a loyalty and a kinship on which they knew they could rely, and – more to the point – it was a guarantee of a good laugh. These kids thieved together, fought together, took turns to dream up ever more inventive ways of keeping boredom at bay. When it came to names, Bruce was less forthcoming. The guy I really needed to talk to, he said, was one of his team who worked at the coal face. His name was Paul O'Brien, and for the following sequence – loosely based on a rendezvous he arranged for my benefit at a deserted KFC outlet in the shadow of the Fratton Park football stadium - I owe him a huge debt of gratitude. Some characters step straight onto the page. Paul Winter, nine books ago, was one of them. Young Connor was another.

*Connor said he was fourteen but Faraday didn't believe him. He was Pompey-thin, with gelled hair, bitten nails, and a look of permanent anxiety in his wide blue eyes. A blue Henri Lloyd top hung on his bony frame. On the cusp between childhood and adolescence, he talked in a low mumble with an occasional cackle of laughter when something struck him as funny.*

*He'd agreed to meet on the condition that Faraday bought him a Big Bucket at the Kentucky Fried. It had to be the KFC in the Pompey Centre, next to Fratton Park, because Connor was on multiple ASBOs, and most of the rest of the city was out of bounds to him.*

*Strictly speaking, Faraday was taking a risk on a meet like this. Best practise demanded specialist officers who worked with juveniles all the time and maybe an appropriate adult to sit in. The paperwork alone would have taken hours.*

*"How come the ASBOs?" Faraday helped himself to a chip.*

*Connor looked round, disappointed at the lack of audience. The place was empty.*

*"Assault by battery, bit of happy slapping, bit of twocking. Yeah, and I nicked a speed boat."*

*"How come?"*

*"Dunno. It was just there."*

*The boat, he explained, had been tied to a mooring buoy on Langstone Harbour. Connor and a couple of mates had been eyeing it for a while. They'd waded out at high tide and helped themselves, just for the laugh, but then the tide had turned and they'd found themselves drifting out through the harbour mouth. Only an alert coastguard had saved them from a night in the English Channel.*

*Faraday vaguely remembered the story from a piece in the News. Three Lads in a Boat.*

*"So what happened?"*

*"The Old Bill was waiting when we got towed back. Five of them. Well funny, that was."*

*As well as the ASBOs, Connor was now tagged and on curfew. He pushed the chair back from the table, rolled up one leg of the Adidas track bottoms, and insisted Faraday take a look. The curfew, he said, had originally been for ten in the evening. Now, it was seven.*

*"So how come you were at that party on Saturday?"*

*"Never said I was, did I?"*

*"But you know about it?"*

*"Course. Everyone knows about it. Fucking laugh, mush."*

*One of his brothers, he said, had gone. First thing he knew he'd been sitting at home watching the football on the telly with the old tit.*

*"The old tit?"*

*"Me mum. My brother, see, him and another geezer had found all this wine, bottles of the stuff. He don't know nothing about wine, Clancy, so he phones the old tit to find out whether it's any good."*

*"He hadn't tried it?"*

*"No, mush. It was a bottle, like I say, not opened or anything, and there's loads more where that came from. Clancy, right, he don't drink wine. But he wants a little earn, yeah?"*

*"And your mum?"*

*"She don't know nothing about wine neither so Clancy says what he'll do, like, is bring a load home anyway because all the good gear had gone already."*



*"Like what?"*

*"Dunno." He sat on his hands, shrugging. "I-pods? Phones? Cameras? Jewellery? Any moolah lying around? Any bugle going spare?"*

*"Bugle?"*

*"Toot. White. Cocaine."*

*"And was there?"*

*"Dunno, mush. Like I say, I weren't there."*

*"And the wine?"*

*"Clancy had a load away."*

*"How did he carry it?"*

*"Pillow cases. Off the bed. He had a bit of flange up there, anything to get his dick wet, Clancy. Nicked the pillow cases after, like."*

*"And the wine? He sold it in the end?"*

*"Dunno. Might have done. The old tit tried a bottle. Said it was alright."*

*Faraday nodded, wondering what Peter Ault would make of this conversation. Precious wines laid down for years. Necked by the old tit.*

*Connor had barely touched the food. Faraday told him it was getting cold. The boy looked at it a moment, then pushed it away.*

*"Ain't hungry, mush. So what's this about?"*

*Faraday explained a little more about the party, knowing full well that none of this would be news to the likes of Connor. There'd been loads of damage. Two people had died.*

*"And you wanna know about a sort called Bonner, yeah?"*

*The directness of the question startled Faraday.*

*"Yes." He agreed. "I do."*

*"Why's that, then?"*

*"I need to talk to her."*

*"About them bodies?"*

*"Yeah. And one or two other issues."*

*"Yeah, but it's the bodies really, innit? 'Cos me and my mates know she's off her head. I had a ruck with her once. She gobbed at*

me, just for nothing, like. And you know what? I had a fag on and I put it out in her face...bang..." One thin arm shot out. "...just like that. She went mental. Silly old moose."

"That was recently?"

"Yeah."

"And you've seen her since?"

"Fucking joking, mush. She carries a blade."

"All the time?"

"Yeah. She's fucking psycho, too. Don't get me wrong, mush. I'd fight her if I had to. No way no bird's ever gonna slap me around. But you don't go looking for it, do you? Not in this fucking city. Not the way it is. There are people want to hurt you out there, really hurt you. And she's one of them. She's vile. Fucking dangerous, too. Like I say, off her head."

"You know where to find her?"

The question put a new light in Connor's eyes.

"Why's that, then? You wanna talk to her?"

"Yes. I just told you."

"But you're serious? You really wanna do it? Arrest her? Get her sent away?"

"We'd see."

"See, bollocks. She's fucking evil. I'm telling you."

"So where do I find her?"

The frown put years on Connor's face. He reached for a plastic spoon and gave the congealing beans a poke. Watching, Faraday wondered whether he might be older, not younger, than fourteen.

"You want an address, like. Yeah?"

"Yeah."

"That might be hard."

Faraday nodded. He knew exactly where this conversation was going.

"How hard?"

"Fucking well-hard. And fucking dodgy, too, a sort like her." He stared at Faraday.

"So what's stopping you?"

*“Nothing mush.” He was sitting on his hands again. “But yer gotta have a little earn, ain’t yer?”*

The writing of what was to become *No Lovelier Death* taught me a great deal about the way the series was evolving. For one thing, Winter’s journey to the Dark Side offered the perfect opportunity to run two separate enquiries in parallel. Released from custody, an enraged Bazza Mackenzie orders Winter to use all his investigative skills to nail those responsible for the two deaths and deliver them for punishment. This Winter will do, cutting every conceivable corner en route, while Joe Faraday – hampered by all the procedural clutter that has begun to make his job impossible – moves at a far warier speed. These two plot paths interlink at multiple points in the narrative, offering rich pickings for the grateful author, but as the story developed I began to realise that – in their separate ways – both Faraday and Winter were heading for a very bad place. Quite how bad, I wouldn’t discover for several books to come but here’s a clue. This is Winter’s voice. In the book’s opening pages, he’s on the prowl in the aftermath of the party and he’s just spotted a familiar figure.

*It was full daylight by now, the rich yellow spill of sunrise throwing long shadows across the road. With Sandown Road in sight, Winter suddenly came to a halt. The greying, bearded figure walking towards him was unmistakeable: Faraday.*

*Winter ducked into a front garden, watching the D/ I fumbling in his jacket for his car keys. Same old clapped-out Mondeo, he thought. Same RSPB sticker on the top corner of the windscreen. With the door open, Faraday took off his jacket and then had a stretch, his face to the sun, his chin tilted up, and watching him Winter realised how much he seemed to have aged. There were lines in his face that he’d never seen before, and when his head came down, his whole body seemed to slump.*

*Over the last years of his service, Winter had developed a soft spot for Faraday. They’d never been mates, and never would be, but he recognised a loner when he saw one, and he knew, too, that in a*

*job that was rapidly becoming impossible, Faraday would never make it easy for himself.*

*Younger D/Is, with an eye on the next promotion, would be cluey enough to buy the right drinks for the right bosses. Older detectives might succumb to the odd short cut. But Faraday did neither, maintaining a prickly independence that won him more respect than friendships. With his passion for birdlife and his deaf-mute son, he'd won himself a reputation for something of an oddball. Before Winter left the force, he'd also added a new girlfriend to this strange life of his. Not some retread divorcee from over the hill, standard MO for detectives of Faraday's age, but a youngish anthropologist. And French, to boot.*

*Winter watched Faraday check the road behind him, then execute a messy U-turn before accelerating away. He's knackered, Winter thought. And it's starting to show.*

This kind of fictional opportunity, one lead character taking the other by surprise, had existed in the previous books but Winter's new role alongside Bazza Mackenzie seemed to have sharpened both the contrasts and the similarities between them. They both needed to coax a result from the deepening chaos around them. And in both cases they could rely on support from unexpected quarters.

In Faraday's case, this turned out to be a winsome French anthropologist called Gabrielle, whom he'd met while bird watching in a remote corner of Thailand. Her chosen field, exploring the pack instincts of near-delinquent inner-city kids in a developed western society, offered an obvious sounding board for Faraday in his more reflective moments. These conversations over a bottle or two of Cotes-du-Rhone in the peace of the Bargemaster's House became an important in the book's development, and Gabrielle herself was to be a key trigger when the plot gathered speed towards the denouement.

But it was Winter who found himself in the scariest company. Joining Mackenzie had never been less than a gamble. On a good day, and there were many good days, Pompey's budding entrepreneur could be the best company imaginable. Plus he had the

money, the reach, the ambition, and the raw nerve which Winter had so missed in the Job. But that same combination of qualities could put Winter in situations which he found, at best, ugly and, at worst, beyond imagination.

Towards the end of the book, he finds himself in a half finished hotel above one of the seaside towns that litter the coast north of Malaga. Mackenzie has tasked him to deliver £20,000 in notes to his one-time enforcer, Brett West, as a farewell present after years of loyal service. Winter doesn't know it yet, but this single incident will be the major turning point in his journey through the rest of the series.

*Winter was wondering about a plate of something to eat when he heard the clatter of a diesel outside in the sunshine. Moments later, there was the sound of a door slamming, then came the clump of footsteps on the wooden stairs outside. He looked round as the door swung open. Not one figure silhouetted against the evening sunshine, but two.*

*Westie's tall frame advanced towards the bar. He was wearing jeans and a white T-shirt. Beside him, smaller but just as lean, was a woman. In the dusty half-light of the restaurant it was hard to be certain but at first glance Winter thought early twenties. Her bare legs were long and tanned. Her hair fell in blond ringlets around a wide, pretty face and the smile was unforced.*

*"Renate." Westie announced.*

*Winter stood up and gestured the woman into one of the seats. Westie, uninvited, took the other. Hernandez ghosted in with a third chair which he placed at the head of the table.*

*"So how come...?" Westie gestured round at the deadness of the place.*

*"I like it. It's cool." Renate leaned across the table and put a hand on Westie's arm. She wore a silver bangle on her slim brown wrist. Her accent, thought Winter, might have been German.*

*"Known Westie long?" he inquired.*

*"Since yesterday. He comes to my gallery. He likes my pictures. He has taste, your friend. He knows what to say, how to say it. We*

can get a drink here?" She cocked her head towards the bar, then began to wind a strand of hair around a single finger.

Winter signalled to Hernandez. Two more beers appeared.

"Sorted, then?" Winter was back with Westie. "No more Pompey slappers?"

"Never, mate. No fucking way."

"And what about the flat?"

"It's up for sale. Say the word, and the mortgage is yours. Good bloody riddance."

"No regrets? None at all?"

"Are you blind, mate?" He nodded towards Renate. "Or just fucking old?"

He wanted to know about the money. Winter, increasingly uncomfortable, noticed that Hernandez had disappeared.

"It's down there, Westie. In my bag."

"You've counted it?"

"No, but Baz has. First thing this morning. Before I got the plane down."

"What time was that, then?"

"Early."

"How early?"

"Bloody early."

"Which airport?"

Winter sat back. Even the girl could sense the hesitation in his voice.

"Pub quiz is it, Westie? Think of a question? Any question?"

"Not at all, mate. Down here we call it conversation. I'm just asking which poxy airport you flew out of this morning. Gatwick? Big place off the M23? Bournemouth? Heathrow? Only you're starting to make me nervous, mush." His eyes flicked down to the bag. As they did so, Winter heard the lightest footfall in the shadowed space behind the bar.

It was Tommy Peters. He had an automatic in his right hand. The silencer made it look enormous. The girl had seen it too. Her hand went to her mouth. Westie had his back to the bar. His big mistake

was to look round.

He tried to get to his feet but it was too late. The first bullet took him in the chest, the softest phutt from the silencer, the second hit him in the lower jaw, sending a fine spray of blood over Winter. He looked up to see the gun traversing towards the girl. The impact of Westie against the table had sent her sprawling. Now she was crouching on the wooden floor, one arm shielding her upturned face, pleading for her life.

“Easy, Tommy.” Winter tried to get his body between the two of them.

Tommy Peters glanced across, the merest flicker of irritation, before stooping to the girl and putting three more bullets into her head. Two figures materialised from behind the curtain at the back. Winter recognised neither of them. Tommy grunted something about a van, then helped them manhandle West’s body through the back of the bar. Winter sank back into his seat, hearing their grunts recede into the depths of the building. Then came the sound of a sliding door, metal on metal, from somewhere outside.

Hernandez had appeared with a mop and a bucket. Winter was staring down at the girl. One of the bullets had smashed her cheekbone. An eyeball hung, glistening, in the slant of evening sunlight through the nearby window. Winter had never seen anything as terrible as this. It had happened so quickly, he told himself. There was nothing he could have done to stop it.

Tommy was back with the other two men. They were amused by something Tommy must have said about Westie. They had London accents.

The girl was much lighter. The pair of them carried her out of the restaurant, Hernandez behind them, mopping up the trail of blood she left behind.

Tommy Peters picked up the bag and began to count the money. He stopped at twenty thousand, put the blocks of notes carefully to one side, then extracted another seven hundred and fifty.

“Expenses.” He said. “Tell Mackenzie I’ll be in touch.”

Winter nodded, too shocked to pursue any kind of conversation.

*The bangle on her wrist, he kept thinking. Her smile. The way she wound that strand of hair around her finger. Gone. Bam. Wasted.*

*Tommy produced a plastic bag and departed with the money. Shortly afterwards, Winter heard a cough out the back somewhere as the van fired up. Then he felt someone nudging the table and he sat back, still numbed, to find Bazza Mackenzie counting the rest of the ten pound notes. The lads were outside in the Mercedes, he said. And they were all going into town for a drink or two.*

*He turned round to find Winter getting slowly to his feet.*

*“You’re in a bit of a state, mush.” He nodded at the bloodstains across his shirt. “We’ll have to have that off you.”*

From this point on, Winter is a changed man. I didn’t realise it at the time, but the impact of this single scene was to dictate the shape of the rest of the series.

## *Eleven*

The phone call came from Conrad Williams, my indefatigable TV agent. Conrad is a one-off, a clubbable slightly louche fixer of genius who trained as a lawyer, plays Schumann on the piano to near professional standard, and manages to salt demon negotiating skills with a sharp sense of humour. He was the guy who negotiated my first TV contract for *Rules of Engagement* more than two decades ago and thus set me on the road to full-time authorhood. If this book is anyone’s fault, it’s Conrad’s.

“Had a nibble, old bean. Richard Fell at Tiger Aspect wants to take you to lunch. I said I thought that wouldn’t be a problem.”

It wasn’t. Tiger Aspect were major players in the world of independent TV production, responsible for shows like *The Vicar of Dibley* and *Murphy’s Law*. I knew they’d been having a look at a couple of books in the series but had no idea their interest extended to



breaking bread.

I took the train to London. We met at Soho House, the rendezvous that has nurtured so many TV deals. Richard was a development executive and he'd brought a woman called Melissa Gallant, who'd be babysitting the project if and when it went into development.

Melissa was young. More importantly, she'd recently graduated from Portsmouth University and knew the city really well. This was a huge windfall because it saved me having to make the point that Pompey was a major character in the series and demanded – on screen – the right kind of attention. Melissa nodded. This, she said, was exactly Tiger Aspect's view. The place was deeply special, a secret that deserved to be shared with a far wider audience. At last, there might be an opportunity to move TV crime fiction out of the usual metropolitan locations and root a series somewhere slightly more real.

The lunch went well. I talked about the trouble I'd taken to get the procedural stuff exactly right and we discussed the importance of the minor key. The world I'd created was mercifully thin on serial killers and wide-screen chase sequences but came with huge helpings of petty crime, random violence, feral kids, booze, drugs, and all the other urban goodies that badged modern life. The cops in my books do their best to cope with this flood of social inadequates but are shackled by a system that has become risk-averse and paper-heavy. It was important to me, as it would be important to any author, that any screen treatments should reflect the spirit of the books. Of course everything would have to be compressed and tailored for a different medium and - hopefully - a far wider audience. But whatever had drawn them to Faraday in the first place deserved a little respect.

This little speechette drew nods around the table. Richard would be talking to Conrad about an option agreement while Melissa promised to keep me in touch with developments on the script front. Tiger already had a writer in mind and he was currently tucked up with a number of my books. This guy was evidently hot just now, which would help in the commissioning process. Naturally, Melissa would be taking him down to Pompey for the guided tour and being the kind of guy he was she had no doubts that he'd recognise the city's

distinctive buzz. For my part, I offered to talk to one or two guys at Hantspol headquarters and arrange for detailed confidential briefings to keep the screen versions as authentic as possible. Melissa thought that was an excellent idea.

I returned to Devon that afternoon. When Conrad asked me next day how the lunch had gone, I said it had been great. A definite meeting of minds. Lots of agreement on preserving the basic thrust of the series. And a feeling, rare in my experience, that this thing might just happen.

The following week, in search of clues for the next book, I drove over to Pompey. Rich John had left Colin Smith's office and was now a uniformed Chief Inspector at Kingston Crescent, a position of some influence that ranked him second only to the uniformed Superintendent, a guy called David Peacock. In policing terms, Rich now had the keys to the city and when I asked him for a detailed brief on the latest developments, he was happy to oblige. If I'd put a couple of days aside, he'd tuck me up with the right people. And so he did.

Living more than a hundred miles away, these little excursions back to Pompey were becoming more and more important. Not only was current practice within the police force changing – with all the attendant procedural nausea - but the city itself was undergoing a real transformation. It felt wealthier, more pleased with itself. It was no longer just a place for a pint or ten of Wife-beater, a curry, and a fight.

How wrong I was. My first appointment was at Fratton nick to sit in on the daily Management Meeting, an excellent opportunity for yours truly to take a 24 hour snapshot of exactly what was happening in the darker reaches of the city. To be honest, I'd chosen one of the quieter days. Rich kicked off with news about a toe-rag from Somerstown who was pissing off drug dealers in the city. A D/S sitting on the Intel brief had described him as "pre-killed".

"He's a walking G28," she said. "Someone needs to have a word."

A G28, in case you're wondering, is the reporting form used for

dead bodies. Having this guy killed would generate a great deal of paperwork. Better, in the view of the D/S, to have him move elsewhere.

The meeting went on, with Rich tallying the overnight score. Alleged firearms at an address in Buckland. A reported rape in a multi-occupied house in Southsea. A multi-source fire in flat in a huge block in Somerstown. The flat had been full of Kosovans. The alarms had been ripped out and there was blood on the telly. My neighbour at the table scribbled BW on her notepad. BW, it turned out, meant "bit weird".

Elsewhere in Pompey, there was an on-going problem with a two-man gang doing distraction robberies, targetting old people living alone. Two outstanding mispers, both young girls, had been located safe and sound. A guy collecting signatures for a non-existent petition in Commercial Road had been arrested on suspicion of selling the signatures on the internet, while another IC1 had also been arrested for wanking in the bushes at Great Salterns. IC1 means white. Rich confirmed that the lad been weighed off.

"All in hand, then?" This from the intel queen.

A ripple of laughter went round the table. My neighbour reached for her pen again. LPS, she wrote. Local Pompey Shit.

An hour later, I was down at Pompey's Central police station. Known as the Bridewell, this houses the Custody Centre, one of the busiest in the force area. The guy in charge was a uniformed Inspector called Tony Tipping, a burly ex-submariner with a Scouse accent and a long memory. Presiding over the custody centre gives you a seat in the front stalls as far as Pompey's concerned, especially at weekends, and he painted a picture of a proudly violent city, always in your face, full of lippy kids and older piss-heads desperate for a fight.

"It reminds me of Liverpool some days," he said. "It's full of swagger. Full of vendettas. People here have a long memory. If the guy's fighting you at four, he'll still be fighting you at forty." Ugly, he said, was a word made for Pompey. Not the city's spirit, which was in great nick, but the look of the place, and the look of the people who

lived there. "You can even see it in the pit bulls," he laughed. "There's nothing pretty about a Pompey dog."

The conversation drifted to specific policing challenges. Lately, his beat officers had been noticing how the no-smoking laws had upped the figures for assault. On a Friday night, huge groups of smokers would be hanging around outside pubs, physically narrowing the pavement. Stepping into the road was a big Friday night issue for certain kinds of men and stuff tended to kick off. On- street violence, as ever, was Pompey's default setting.

So were his guys coping? They were. His uniformed blokes were on top of their patch and did the biz. They knew how to answer aggression with aggression and kept the lid on most situations. About the younger breed of detectives, though, he wasn't so certain. "They tend to be technocrats," he said. "They don't go into pubs enough. It's all process, all procedure. They need to get out there, have a few conversations."

This was interesting. In my game, you're always alert for that half-sentence, that throw-away remark, that might open a whole new fictional line of enquiry. This was a guy for whom Pompey low life would hold few secrets. How did he see things going over the next year or three?

"In this city, you mean?"

"Yeah."

"Or in society in general?"

"Both."

"That's hard. And it isn't good. The nuclear family's gone. It's history. We get kids in here who've never had a man in their lives, never eaten at a table. They don't fear us, they don't fear anyone. The girls are the same. If anything they're worse. Yet the only way these people are gonna be able to live is by having kids of their own. So where does that take us?"

Good question. Gary Cable was next on my list. This was a D/S on the Priority Crime Team who came highly recommended. He worked out of the CID offices in Highland Road and ran a bunch of pro-active detectives who responded to the ever-changing patterns of

crime in the city. Most of this stuff is drugs-related and just now Gary was doing his best to disrupt a bunch of black dealers who were making the ninety minute hop down from south London. We went out in his unmarked Fiesta to find them. Names like Black Marcus, Diamond Leon, Bobby Harvey.

"These are guys making a grand's worth of profit in a day," he told me. "They arrive in a hire car with some paid numptie at the wheel and do the tour. We know all the hot spots and we nick them from time to time when we know we can cause maximum damage, but they get grief from the locals, too. Pompey boys see one of these black guys serving up so they give him a slap or two towards the end of the day when he's carrying, then rob him blind. You see their point, don't you? Who's the black guy gonna run to? Us?"

He laughed. Gary was small and punchy with a lean frame. You sensed a great deal of anger, the kind of rage born from frustration, and it was no surprise to learn that he ran the four miles to and from work every day. "Helps no end," he admitted. "Turns me into a human being again after a rough shift."

We drove around the crappier areas of Southsea and Fratton, ticking off the junkies waiting for their next fix. Then he spotted a dealer, two-up in a hire car. We slipped into the traffic three cars behind him. Black Marcus. Down from London. Just now he was running a buy-5-wraps-get-3-free deal and the street couldn't get enough of the stuff. Like Andy Harrington, the King of Intel, Gary had the maths imprinted on his soul. We were talking toot at the time. A couple of grand for 90% pure at source. £80K retail once it hits the street. Why work for anything less?

We tailed Black Marcus for a while. He was on the phone most of the time. Then he stopped on a double yellow and dived into a corner store. Carried downstream with the rest of the traffic, we lost him. At this point we were close to the seafront but Gary wanted to show me something else and so we headed back into the city's badlands.

On the estates, the shops are grouped together side by side and as we drove slowly past a heavily protected Londis Gary pointed out the guys he regularly nicked for shoplifting. These were junkies, too,

and fed their habit by stealing to order. There was a ready door-to-door market for hookey cheese and bacon on the estates but lately the shopkeepers had wised up and started putting padlocks on their freezer cabinets. This had been a problem for a couple of days but now those same shopkeepers were reporting volume thefts of Nescafe, sugar, batteries, DVDs, razor blades...anything that would find a market.

I made a note. Worth a line or two.

But Gary hadn't finished. We were in the very middle of the island by now, in the maze of streets where Fratton spills into Copner. We stopped at the head of long terrace of houses, most of them subdivided. Blue and white Pompey scarves hanging in the windows. Trashed sofas, sagging mattresses and rusty washing machines abandoned in the tiny oblongs of front garden. Security grills over some of the front doors.

"See that one?" Gary was pointing at a boarded-up property across the road. "Used to be a skunk factory. We bust it a week ago. Top job."

According to Gary there were cannabis factories all over the city. As soon as you nailed one, the investors would find another address. It was money, once again, that did the talking. £4K rent in advance would buy a six month lease. The house would be stripped. Heaters, hydroponics, and a filtration system would be installed, along with a farmer from the Mekong Delta who was flown in to take care of the plants themselves. These were the little guys in the rubber flip-flops who didn't speak a word of English. Under threat of a beating, they'd never leave the house. The guy they'd nicked last week was convinced he was in London.

"The growing cycle's three months," Gary explained. "At the end of the quarter you're looking at two hundred grand, cash. Money for nothing."

These enterprises weren't risk-free. Neighbours complained about a funny smell. The electricity and water companies reported huge spikes in consumption. And Boxer One, the force spy plane, regularly flew patrols over the city, searching for hot spots with an

infra red camera. Growing cannabis generated serious heat and the red blobs were mapped for later investigation.

On the way back to Southsea, Gary began to talk about the frustrations of the job. One of them, it seemed, were the guys at the Crown Prosecution Service.

“We’ll nick a dealer. He’s carrying 36 wraps. There’s no way that’s for personal use. He’s cuffed and stuffed. He goes no comment in interview but it doesn’t matter. Then we take the file along to the CPS and they take one look at it and then laugh. They tell me they haven’t got enough. They need a 90% chance of conviction before they’ll take it to court. We need more evidence. More *evidence*? To me 36 wraps is a stone bonker. To them it’s just pissing in the wind.”

Gary hadn’t finished. Only a couple of week’s back he’d got sight of a typical seven-day cycle in the training school over at Netley. This particular course is supposed to teach young probationers about proper coppering. Gary shot me a look and then tallied each day’s subjects on his fingers. Day One: Proportionality, Necessity and Integrity. Day Two: Human Rights. Day Three: Social Care. Day Four: Victim Care. Day Five: Pensions Advice. Day Six: Vehicle Theft. Day Seven: Legal Liability with reference to Camera Phones.

“Human rights?” he braked to avoid a cyclist. “You can’t just grab people any more. If I do, I’m the one who’ll get arrested and probably go off to prison on top of it. The days of Paul Winter are over. The mind set’s changed completely. To be a good policeman I always believed you had to be a bit of a criminal but that’s all gone. You ever heard of the LAMA principle? No? It means Look Out For My Arse.”

It got worse (or better, depending on your point of view). Back at Kingston Crescent, I was sitting in Rich John’s office. We were talking about POs (Persistent Offenders), the nightmare low-lives who blag all the resources. A local example was a guy in his late twenties with umpteen convictions to his name. He made a living by serving up drugs from his mum’s Buckland flat. He’d recently assaulted his partner’s mother by punching her in the face. He’d also tried to burn her flat down and was currently on police bail, suspected of arson. This was bad enough but a couple of days ago he’d threatened to stab

his partner, pour petrol all over her, light a match, and then add her ten month old baby to the bonfire.

“That was his baby, too?”

“No one knows. Including him.” Rich’s eyes rolled. “Makes you wonder, doesn’t it?”

I carried all this research back to Devon. As yet I had no firm plan for the next book but a picture of society in freefall, evident in most of the previous books, was clearer than ever. The police, I have to admit, get to see a great deal more than the rest of us but I was beginning to realise that a lot of this stuff was starting to bleed into everyday life. Society was getting cruder. People were interested in nothing but their own needs. Everyone seemed to have a right to everything. Where were the good guys? Where were the causes worth fighting for? What on earth was happening to us all?

Questions like these were to stitch through Book Ten. By now I had a working title, *Bad Stuff Coming*. It wasn’t to survive the edit but I knew there had to be space in the narrative for Faraday to voice a little of what I was picking up. Here he is with his French anthropologist, the new love of his life.

*Last year, for months on end, Gabrielle had been researching gang culture on the city’s estates. She’d done countless interviews with kids of all ages, trying to map the web of loyalties which so often replaced family structures that – for one reason or another – had simply disintegrated. Some of her findings had taken her by surprise. She was an anthropologist by training and she recognised that membership of a gang was a godsend for kids who had simply run out of people who might love them. In the absence of functioning mums or dads, belonging to a gang offered very welcome shelter from what Gabrielle had come to refer to as “la tempête qui vient.”*

*Quite what this gathering storm might bring she’d never made clear but day by day, week by week, Faraday was beginning to recognise the symptoms. The nineteen-year-old smack head who’d had her third miscarriage on the steps of the magistrates’ court. The estate mums*



*with no previous record who regularly shoplifted from the corner store to feed their kids. The boyfriend with an anger management problem who punched his girlfriend's granny in the face over a ten-pound debt and then set her on fire. And now the dead Kyle Munday, whose party piece was training his pit bull to kill swans on Great Salterns lake. Some of these horror stories were down to simple inadequacy. Others were the product of hard times. But some, including Munday, spoke of a deep well of something else. Evil was a word that Faraday had always tried to avoid but some days, like now, it was staring him in the face.*

By now it was late summer and I was coming ever-closer to the point where I had to make a few decisions. Then, out of the blue, came an e-mail from a dentist-friend in Old Portsmouth who had a very interesting patient list. Ever curious about Pompey's other life, he was picking up gossip that suggested that what he termed "the Pompey property ramping circle " was coming seriously unstuck. These were the solicitors, surveyors, estate agents, council planners, politicians and various other luminaries who'd stuck their noses into Bazza's trough and made themselves rich on the ever bigger feast that was the Southsea property bubble. That bubble had now burst, leaving lots of people mired in negative equity and there were rumours that even Bazza was feeling the pinch.

From other sources I'd heard that the Men in Blue had pretty much given up on Bazza and decided to concentrate their resources on other players in the supply chain, chiefly the wholesalers who dished out the wraps to the dealers on the street. I put this proposition to a contact in a position to know. As far as he was aware, Bazza was still under active investigation, and the clever use of certain bits of legislation, especially connected to money laundering, were showing distinct promise. No transaction, said my contact, ever happened in a vacuum. Guys like Bazza knew exactly how to take care of business at the sharp end but washing all that money was never going to be easy. If you knew where to look, there was always an audit trail.

This I knew already but the collapse in the property market,

coupled with ominous signs that the banking system would be next for the chop, sparked a thought or two about Bazza's fictional future. What if his commercial empire – largely secured on bricks and mortar – was beginning to fall apart? What if he spotted some kind of bargain abroad – say a hotel in Spain – and decided to buy it? And what if he was careless about the source of the money?

I worked on this notion for a couple of days, then cranked up the pressure on Bazza. His daughter, Esme, would be having an affair outside her marriage. Not just any affair but a liaison with a serving copper, a nightmare DCI called Perry Madison. Worse still, in mid book, Bazza's beloved grandson – Esme's oldest boy – would be kidnapped against a sizeable ransom. It would naturally fall to Winter, Bazza's trusty lieutenant, to sort out these two hiccoughs, a task which would take him to a very bad place indeed.

Prior to the excerpt below, Bazza has accepted a hefty loan to buy the Spanish hotel from a major London cocaine dealer called Alan Garfield. This money, heavily tainted, would be a gift for any investigator with a working knowledge of the Proceeds of Crime Act. Andy Harrington, for one, would be reaching for the Moët.

*Winter, despairing, took himself off for a walk. The danger, he knew, was acute. Ever since he'd started work for Bazza Mackenzie he'd recognised the sheer scale of the challenge that lay ahead. The very things that so often made the man a joy to be with – his instinct for the killer move, his delight in running rings round the competition, his contempt for the boring and the ordinary – were equally a handicap when it came to taking advice. He never listened. He always assumed – knew – that he was in the right. Winter, with a lifetime of manipulation behind him, had quickly sussed how to channel Bazza's wild energy, how to torpedo some of his crazier schemes, but he'd always been aware that something enormous might suddenly turn up and swamp them both. That something had arrived and yet Bazza still couldn't see it.*

*At the kitchen table Winter had done his best. They were up against classy opposition. Faraday and Suttle knew what they were*

about. The Met were definitely crawling all over Garfield. He and Bazza, had precious little time to block the holes in their little stockade and keep the Apaches at bay. Bazza didn't begin to see this, partly because it wasn't in his nature to do the Filth any kind of favour, but mostly because he couldn't stop thinking about his kidnapped grandson. He'd always been especially proud of Guy. The boy was gutsy, a bit of a scrapper. He was bright too, and funny. If it was true that the better genes jumped a whole generation then there was no one prouder than Bazza Mackenzie.

Winter looked back at the house before he stepped out onto the pavement. Marie, he knew, had introduced Mo Sturrock to the kids, and as far as he was aware Mo was still up with them. Half nine was late for five-year-olds but just now time seemed to have lost any meaning. He thought of Stu in the kitchen, nursing yet another can of Stella, of Esme still sulking in the spare room upstairs, of Bazza drinking himself insensible in his den, and wondered whether every family enterprise was doomed to end this way, in a car wreck of blame and recrimination, any hope of rescue slipping remorselessly away.

He wandered down the road and headed for the seafront. The last embers of a decent sunset were dying in the west and a thin grey mist hung over the Solent. There were strings of coloured lights on the promenade and the warmth of the evening had drawn couples out for an evening stroll. Winter paused for a moment at the seawall, smelling the heat still rising from the pebbles, knowing how much this city meant to him. He'd spent most of his working life policing the battlefield. Lately, he'd had a lot of fun on the other side of no-man's-land. He understood the place. He spoke its many languages. He was totally fluent in Pompey. And, perhaps for that reason, he had absolutely no illusions about what lay ahead. Unless someone took the initiative, he was fucked.

Mo Sturrock, who figures in the above excerpt, turned out to be the pivotal figure in this book. He's a gifted social worker who lives on the Isle of Wight. He has a wife he adores and three kids: Temple, Poppy and Fleur. The plot demands that he takes a stand against the

madness of local authority social work and somehow accepts an offer to head Bazza's Tide Turn Trust, a charity dedicated to turning round some of the city's wayward youth.

Using Mo Sturrock, I could very effectively marry two separate storylines in the book while – at the same time – taking an informed look at the social chaos that was threatening to engulf us all. The only problem was that I knew zilch about social work.

Andy Harrington, yet again, came to the rescue. He knew a woman called Rosie Rae who'd once been a D/C in Pompey. As far as he knew she now worked on the Isle of Wight in the field of child protection. He gave me a number and wished me luck.

I rang Rosie the same afternoon. We agreed to talk when I was next down in Pompey. A week or two later, I took the hovercraft across to Ryde on a Sunday and we met in a café on Union Street.

Rosie arrived with her daughter, who was near-university age and nearly as striking as her mother. Rosie talked engagingly about the Island mind-set which, as far as I could work out, was a law unto itself. It was, she said, like living in a big village. Everyone knew everyone. The idea of privacy was a joke. She was equally candid about Social Services. Coping with wayward kids was nobody's idea of an easy ask but there were real challenges making sure that kids didn't get lost in the system because they didn't quite meet the criteria for social care.

I started to sense a yawning gap between local authority services and the charitable or voluntary sector, with kids in trouble in some danger of vanishing in the spaces in between. This suggested a world of turf issues and knee-jerk reactions, often sparked by the latest *Daily Mail* headline, and the longer Rosie talked, the more convinced I became that Mo Sturrock, my fictional social worker, would be exactly the kind of maverick guy to lose patience with all this in-fighting.

By now I'd outlined the role I had in mind for Mo. He would, I explained, have been working for the local authority but there had to be a plausible reason for him to bale out of the Isle of Wight and join Bazza's Tide Turn Trust over in Pompey. A simple resignation would be too obvious, too boring. I needed to make more of this

opportunity. What might this guy do to bring his glorious career with Isle of Wight Social Services to a spectacular end?

I fetched more coffees while Rosie had a think. By the time I got back, she had a smile on her face.

“We often attend conferences, either in our own right or on behalf of our managers,” she explained. “These get-togethers are normally held in London so you spend a day or a couple of days listening to the all the experts telling you about current best practice and then you get on the train and come home again.”

While she was talking, I tried to work out how much it must cost to put on something like this. According to Rosie, each delegate would be paying around £400. Add the bill for travel, plus the cost of delegates' time, and you'd surely be looking at a sizeable sum. Multiply that sum by – say – 300 delegates, add the organising company's profit, and you're probably talking a quarter of a million quid. That's public money. Some of which must come out of the council tax.

Rosie nodded. Mo Sturrock, we agreed, would feel mightily pissed-off watching all this resource – cash that might have funded foster placements for kids in trouble – being devoted to something that felt infinitely less pressing.

So what if he was standing in for his boss? And what if his boss had been scheduled to give a speech at the conference? Mo would arrive at the rostrum with his boss's speech. He'd put it carefully aside and go totally off-piste, letting rip at what he really felt. Gross waste of time. Criminal use of public money. Standing ovation. End of career.

It was the perfect solution to my plot quandary but what followed was, in a sense, even better. In real life, said Rosie, Mo would quickly find himself on gardening leave. That could very easily last a year. There'd be murmurings about gross misconduct, and maybe dark rumours about inappropriate contacts with kids. He might be named and shamed in the local rag. Everyone on the island would know about his disgrace. Friends in the check-out queue at Tesco would start turning their backs. Nightmare.

Excellent. I rode back to the mainland with a song in my heart. This book would work. I knew it would.

All that remained before I started writing in earnest was a series of conversations with Terry Lowe at Scientific Services about the mystery of familial DNA. This was a technology I'd picked up through reading an article in one of the Sunday broadsheets and I fancied it might offer a key to the plot's resolution but try as I might I couldn't map the exact sequence of events I needed to make this thing work. Terry, bless him, did it for me. He clearly regarded me as special needs when it

came to anything remotely scientific and his many e-mails came complete with capital letters, multiple exclamation marks, helpful references to other texts, and instructions for me to sit in the Naughty Corner for not paying proper attention. Years later, I'm still stumped if anyone asks me about familial DNA but thanks to Terry for one tiny moment I think I understood. And that was time enough to write the scene.

By Christmas, the book was done. I sent it off to Simon, who had doubts about the title but little else. "A cracking read", he wrote. "The focus on the families works amazingly well to the book's benefit and the central conundrum is a profoundly unsettling one. Indeed, this is a book that asks some questions to which there are no easy answers."

I was pleased with it, too, but there were a handful of procedural issues about which I was less than certain. At the very beginning of this adventure, way back in 1999, the first policeman I talked to in real depth was a young D/S called Scott Chiltern. We met in an empty pub in Fratton called the Froddington Arms and he wised me up about the steepness of the path ahead. A decade later, on one of my trips to Pompey, I'd bumped into him again. By now he was a Detective Superintendent on the Major Crimes Team, dealing with proper jobs. We talked about an unsolved killed in Otterbourne, a village south of Winchester, about a body in a suitcase, recovered from another village near Basingstoke, about a marital bloodletting (29 stab wounds!) in a kitchen in Petersfield, and finally about a crop of one-punch homicides that had recently plagued Pompey. Before I left we promised to stay in touch.

A couple of months later, I e-mailed him with my queries for what had now become *Beyond Reach*. I needed to know about the protocols surrounding the interviewing of someone with dementia, about what would happen in real life if a Family Liaison Officer was held hostage by a pack of feral kids, and what would happen if the owner of a Chinese restaurant in Paulsgrove took a hatchet to other kids trying to extort money and killed one of them. In every case, Scott's response was prompt and detailed. But that wasn't the point.

The guy, I'd realised belatedly, was in Kabul on a training attachment to the Afghani police. This was a world of black-outs, car bombs, and deafening rooftop passes by American attack helicopters. Yet still he found time to ponder my queries, reach for his lap top, and add his own thoughts to the fictional mix. Truly amazing.

Before the book was put to bed, there was one last check. Readers, for some reason, appear to know an awful lot about post-mortem procedures. Maybe it's the popularity of shows like *CSI*. I'm not sure. In any event, it pays to cover your authorial arse with details like this and – thanks to John Ashworth – I'd made contact with a pathologist called Debbie Cook.

Debbie is slight, attractive, measured, and has a passion – as any pathologist should – with getting the small print exactly right. She lives in some seclusion with her husband and small daughter on Exmoor and was happy, for our first meeting, to come to our place for lunch. The meal extended through the afternoon. The book that needed Debbie's expertise on this occasion was *No Lovelier Death* and she devoted a busy couple of hours imagining herself into Bazza's garden while she decided exactly what to do with the two bodies beside his pool.

We were having a light fish salad that day, with lashing of white wine, and the quaffing was punctuated with phrases I was only too happy to write down. Debbie lived in a world of digital probes, of vulval swabs, of intradermal bruising and patterned stamping. She described the post-mortem process in detail: how a high-Y incision might make the subsequent dressing of the body difficult; how a removed brain would be left suspended in formalin in a bucket for three weeks in order to firm it up; how important it was to make a layered dissection, looking for deep injuries otherwise easy to miss; how wet drowning filled the lungs with fluid, sending a plume of froth up the windpipe and out through the mouth. Lin was as fascinated as I was and by the end of the meal I like to think we'd all become friends.

Now, aware that I might have cocked one or two things up, I sent her the relevant bits from *Beyond Reach*. A guy gets run over at around 40mph. He suffers, amongst other injuries, multiple scalp



lacerations. The accident itself is never described in real time but inferred in the post-mortem scene that follows.

Debbie's reply arrived the next day. She had a number of things to say about the injuries, all of them immensely helpful, but her real concern was sartorial. She was worried about the pathologist, a guy I'd invented called Dodman. I'd written that he was "tucking the bottoms of his scrubs into the tops of his wellies" while having a conversation with Steph Callan, the uniformed sergeant on the Road Deaths Investigation Team. This, Debbie pointed out, could never have happened because Dodman would have robed himself in the male changing room. I was right, however, to infer that post-mortem scrubs are always a lousy fit and that I might find room for the fact that the smallest wellie available in most mortuaries is Size 9. Debbie, it turned out, was Size 4.

Details like this, to me at least, are fascinating – not simply because they spice a narrative and make it real but because they tell you a great deal about people like Debbie who have built an entire career on getting it right.

It was at this point that I got a call from Angela McMahon, my publicist at Orion. She'd had an inquiry from John Wilson, one of the anchors on BBC Radio 4's excellent nightly arts magazine, *Front Row*. John, it seemed, was a bit of a fan of the books and wanted to do an interview. He happened to be down in Pompey next week for another feature and wondered whether I could spare an hour.

We met at the offices of the *Mary Rose* conservation team in Pompey's Historical Dockyard, where thousands of artifacts from the 16<sup>th</sup> century shipwreck were stored. While John interviewed one of the project team for another *Front Row* feature, I browsed shelves of wooden arrows, crude hypodermics, and bone-handled meat knives. Afterwards, hunting for a location that fitted the Pompey I'd tried to put on the page, John settled for the top of the Spinnaker Tower, the big-bellied signature spike that dominates the harbour.

It was an inspired choice. With the machine in record, we moved from window to window while John pushed me to describe Faraday's

Pompey, Winter's Pompey, and the sprawling empire that Bad Bazza had made his own. I'd never been up here before, and from three hundred feet above the city it was fascinating – to me at least – how tightly these separate fictional worlds interlinked. I talked about the city's origins in the tiny Camber dock, about the ring of distant fortifications thrown up against successive threats of invasion, about the way Pompey people and Pompey pressures never left me short of material, and when John finished by suggesting that a setting like this was probably unique to Portsmouth, I could only agree. "I owe everything to this city," I told him. "And you know why? Because it has a spirit like no other place I've ever known."

The interview, as it turned out, did me to end of good. To date I'd been blessed with generous reviews and committed reviewers, but the move into broadcast national radio, and the kind of audience targetted by a show like *Front Row*, opened the door to a whole new readership. Friends I hadn't heard from years made an effort to get in touch. I'd been on *Front Row*. Things must be looking up.

The second draft of *Beyond Reach* was complete by the middle of January. By now it was 2009. Melissa had been pinging me the occasional update on Tiger Aspect's progress with the TV adaptations and I was keen to see the results. Melissa sent me both scripts the following week. Looking back, I'm not sure quite what I was expecting. I'd worked in TV for twenty years, long enough to know that adaptation is an imperfect process and that any scribe would be foolish to expect his precious characters to survive exactly the way he'd written them. None the less, it was a shock to get to Scene Seven in the first script and find Joe Faraday screwing his best friend's wife at her house while that same D/I – Nick Haydon – is in Critical Care fighting for his life after being run over by a bunch of Scouse drug dealers.

I think something in me died at that moment. I'd had lunch with these people. We'd agreed about the importance of character, about what truly drove this series. Hadn't they read these books? Hadn't they realised the kind of guy Faraday was? Didn't they understand

what was important in his life? Women, certainly. But his best friend's *wife*? When the guy was half-dead?

I read on with little appetite for the rest. The procedural stuff was less than accurate and I began to wonder whether they'd ever put in the right kind of face time with the contacts I'd supplied. By the end, I felt as if my guys – my characters, the men and women who peopled my books and my imagination – had been kidnapped. The scripts left a taste I can only describe as sour.

It probably wasn't Melissa's fault. British TV is predatory. It feasts on last month's successes and simply demands more. So Tiger Aspect had taken my plots and my characters, minced them up, fashioned them into tellyburgers, and fed them into the gaping maw of the prime-time machine. Stories that had started out by running counter to the raging tidal stream that was TV crime fiction ended up as flotsam on that same stretch of water. So when the news arrived that Sky had finally said no after a long weeks of deliberation, I muttered a silent prayer of thanks and asked Conrad whether that was the end of it. Regretfully, yes, he pinged back. But never give up.

I didn't. And here's why. This is the real Joe Faraday, as *Beyond Reach* gathers speed. And the real Winter, too.

*The moment Faraday opened the front door, Winter knew he was in with a shout. Something on the stove was laced with garlic. Classical music played in the background. Either Faraday was expecting other company or the pair of them would be settling in for a cosy evening.*

*Winter stepped into the hall, shaking the rain from his jacket. He'd stopped at the offie up the road for a bottle of something decent.*

*Faraday glanced at the wine. He didn't seem the least surprised by Winter's sudden arrival. He had a bottle already open.*

*'Côtes-du-Rhône OK?'*

*'Love it.'*

*Faraday led him through to the big lounge and poured a glass of red.*

*'Cheers, boss.' Winter raised the glass in salute. 'Where's your lady?'*

*'Don't ask.'*

*'Gone?'*

*'Yep.'*

*'Bad?'*

*'Yep.'*

*In the grey evening light from the window, Faraday looked exhausted, thinner, almost ill. Now Winter knew why. Years ago, when he discovered his wife was dying from cancer, he'd come to this very house on some mad pretext. That night, over the best part of a bottle of Scotch, Faraday had done his best to ease the pain. Maybe now was the time to return the favour.*

*'You want to talk about it?'*

*'Not really.'*

*'Might help.'*

*'Yeah? You think so?'* Faraday sank onto the sofa, reaching for the remote to lower the volume on the audio stack. *Music like this, thought Winter, would turn anyone into a depressive.*

*'Mahler.'* Faraday seemed to read his mind. *'Not to everyone's taste.'*

*'Each to his own, boss. Neil Diamond does it for me.'*

*'I bet.'*

*Winter caught an edge in Faraday's voice but the expression on his face seemed benign enough. His glass was already empty. Winter wondered whether this was the first bottle.*

*'So how's it going then, boss?'*

*Faraday eyed him for a moment or two, said nothing. Winter put the question again. These days his only connection with the Job was Jimmy Suttle, though even at the level of gossip the young D/S was reluctant to risk a conversation.*

*'It's crap,' Faraday said at last. 'If you really want to know.'*

*'Crap how?'*

*'Crap everywhere. We live in a swamp of our own making. We're going backwards. We're sinking. Maybe this happens with every civilisation. Maybe the Romans got there first. God knows.'*

*It dawned on Winter that this wasn't about the Job at all. For*

reasons he didn't understand, Faraday appeared to have thrown in the towel.

*'I'm not with you, boss.'* Winter was still on his feet. *'You're telling me we're doomed?'*

*'I'm telling you it's crap.'* Faraday gestured vaguely towards the window. *'All of it.'*

*From the kitchen came the smell of burning. Winter got there in time to rescue a pan of onions. The air was blue with smoke. He opened a window and flapped around with a tea towel to get rid of the smell. Then he spotted the open bottle of wine and returned to the lounge. Faraday hadn't moved. He watched Winter splashing wine into both their glasses.*

*'You miss it?'*

*'What, boss?'*

*'The Job?'*

*'Never.'*

*'I don't believe you. It was in your bones. I watched you. You could be bloody good when you made the effort. Difficult but bloody effective.'*

*'Difficult as in bent?'*

*'Difficult as in –'* Faraday frowned *'– stroppy. Difficult as in devious. You any good with onions? Only we need to start again.'*

*Winter went back to the kitchen. Faraday had told him where to find the veggie basket. Half a dozen onions nestled amongst a collection of other produce. The new potatoes were still caked with soil. Maybe he grew this stuff himself, Winter thought. Maybe he had an allotment or a veggie patch out in the garden. Another solace. Another refuge.*

*Winter peeled a couple of onions and then looked for a chopping board, unaware that Faraday had joined him. He was standing in the open doorway, leaning against the jamb, staring glassily in. Winter knew he'd been right. Pissed as a rat.*

*'Any garlic, boss?'* Winter was looking round the kitchen.

*'Cupboard above the stove.'*

*Winter reached up. On the back of the cupboard door was a photo of Faraday sharing a hammock with a slender woman in a red bikini.*

*She had a cap of black hair and a generous mouth. She must have taken the photo herself because Winter could see her thin arm stretching towards the camera lens.*

*'That's her?' Winter stood aside.*

*'Yeah.'*

*'Name?'*

*'Gabrielle.'*

*'Lovely.'*

*'You're right. Too lovely.'*

*'Impossible, boss. You know something about life? You can never get too much of it. Never. And you're looking at someone who knows. If it feels good, enjoy it. The rest is bollocks.'*

*Faraday was still gazing at the photo. He appeared to agree. Winter shut the cupboard door and scraped the wreckage in the saucepan into the waste bin. He hadn't come here to cook a meal but under the circumstances he was happy to oblige. He'd never seen any man this lost, this vulnerable.*

*In the absence of further instructions, he sliced the garlic, raided the fridge for a tube of tomato paste, primed the saucepan with a generous splash of olive oil, and started again. There were herbs in a rack beside the cooker. Salt too. A glance into the lounge told him that Faraday had returned to the sofa. The music, thank Christ, had come to an end.*

*On the window sill behind the sink was an ancient radio. Winter helped himself, retuning to BBC Radio Two. Friday Night Is Music Night. Perfect.*

*He found a packet of pasta, a tin of tuna, half a dozen eggs. He filled another saucepan with water and turned the gas up high. Then he had second thoughts, adjusting the flame to a low simmer. Food might return Faraday to sobriety. He didn't want that. Not yet.*

*'I can't vouch for this, boss, but the woman in the office swore by it.'*

*Winter had appeared at Faraday's elbow with the Rioja. The other bottle in the kitchen was empty. Faraday was stretched full length on the sofa, his eyes closed.*

*'You awake, boss?' Winter gave him a nudge.*

*'Yeah.'*

*'Fancy a drop more?'*

*'Silly question.'*

*His hand strayed to the carpet, fumbled for the glass. Winter did the honours.*

*'There's a DCI called Perry Madison,' he said. 'Used to be on Major Crime.'*

*'Complete arsehole.'*

*'You're right. Horrible man.'*

*'Gets up everyone's nose. Ego the size of a planet.'*

*'Yeah.'*

*'And?' Faraday's eyes were open now.*

*Winter perched himself on the arm of the sofa. He wanted to keep this casual, matey, matter-of-fact. He also needed Faraday's total attention.*

*'He's shagging Bazza's daughter,' he said. 'Big time.'*

This turned out to be one of a handful of moments across the series when my two protagonists, so different in so many ways, paused for long enough to take stock of each other. In a curious way, this scene enabled me to understand just how much a decade in the Job was changing them both. Winter, to his own alarm, was heading up a cul-de-sac which could only end in disaster while Faraday, with even less room for manoeuvre, was fast becoming a clinical depressive. At this stage in the series, with two books to go, I'd no idea what lay in wait for either character. Which, on reflection, was probably just as well.

## *Twelve*

In December 2008, with the first draft of *Beyond Reach* complete, Lin and I decided to go somewhere different for Christmas. A couple of years earlier, we'd tried out something similar, packing a couple of rucksacks and taking a series of trains across Europe until we fetched up in Istanbul.

City hopping like this in the depths of winter calls for a savvy choice of pullover but that first journey was unforgettable. Gluwein in the snow beside the towering spires of Cologne Cathedral. Four brilliant days in Vienna, equally snowbound. A wet forty eight hours in Budapest, trying to crack the queues for an onward booking for the next stage in our journey. A bright, freezing morning on Bucharest station where we arrived to find every other child carrying a tiny pre-Xmas lamb. And the final clattering descent through forests of snow-laden Yuletide pine trees to the Golden City on the Bosphorus.

We got off the train at a deserted Istanbul Central station on Christmas Day, found a caff for a breakfast of lentil soup, sorted a cheap hotel, and then took a ferry in the vague direction of the Black Sea until we found a waterside eatery. In the thin sunshine, we ate fresh sardines and chips, washed down with lashing of Efes beer, while we played backgammon. Best Christmas dinner ever.

Now, two years later, we wanted to do something similar but this time use Istanbul as a point of departure. We knew that the city's other main railway station lay on the Asian side of the Bosphorus. From there you could take a train to Iran or Syria. We decided on the Middle East, bought the appropriate visas, and booked a flight to Istanbul.

The first train into Asia took us to Ankara. We were starving. With three hours before the next train that would take us east again, we



tramped into the city and bought bread, tinned fish, cheese, tomatoes, beer and wine. With a compartment to ourselves on the near-empty train, we feasted through the night and woke up on the very edge of Turkey. No one spoke a word of English but we managed a bus, and then found ourselves in a taxi full of cigarette smugglers heading for the Syrian city of Aleppo. By now it was snowing again and Lin was starting to ask the hard questions about my forward research. We'd packed very little extra clothing because I'd believed the Lonely Planet's fantasy predictions about the weather we could expect. 13 degrees Celsius? Bags of sunshine? Fat chance.

It was days later, recovering from flu in Damascus, that I noticed the gathering crowds in the street. Lin was much taken by the men in masks and the forest of green flags. There were hundreds of riot police around and I thought I caught the sour whiff of tear gas as the crowd began to chant but in the spirit of Christmas I wasn't much bothered. Syrian street theatre, I told Lin. Lucky old us.

That afternoon, with the crowds on the street bigger than ever, the penny began to drop. Something deeply unpleasant had kicked off in the Gaza strip and the locals weren't at all happy. That evening, we wandered into the huge covered souk in the middle of the city. Street artists had been busy painting various versions of the star of Israel on the paving slabs and most of the locals went out of their way to trample all over them.

Over the next week, with the Israelis shelling and bombing defenceless civilians in Gaza, it got worse. We were in Jordan by now. Jordan has a huge population of displaced Palestinian refugees from Gaza and the West Bank, and tempers were running high. Aqaba on New Year's Eve was a very bad place to find yourself if you happened to be white and Anglo-Saxon, and we spent most of the time – with various degrees of success – pretending to be French. Aqaba itself, which I'd somehow imagined to be an irresistible mix of history and palm-fringed beaches, was anything but and in the end we fled south on a ferry which took us down the Red Sea to a scruffy Egyptian port called Nuweiba Beach.

Nuweiba Beach is on the edge of the Sinai peninsula. The

weather, at last, had begun to behave itself. The nights were cold but the temperature was up around 70C by midday. This part of Sinai, which extends north to the border with Israel, is normally full of partying Israelis at this time of year but no Jew with half a brain would risk visiting an Arab country with Gaza reduced to rubble and so we had the place to ourselves.

We took a cab north from the ferry port and found a waterside hotel about half an hour away. The hotel, like everywhere else, was empty. It was a big development, rather grand, seven stories, umpteen rooms, tennis courts, swimming pools, well-kept gardens. Without guests it looked shut for the winter but the imposing plate glass door opened to my touch and there was a suited member of staff behind the reception desk. When I inquired about a double room he didn't think there'd be a problem. When I asked the price he said US \$350 a night. Lin had noticed grass huts on the beach. How much were they? US\$49 dollars.

"A night?"

"No," he was eyeing our rucksacks. "A week."

We stayed for six days, sharing the grass hut with a small army of lizards. The beaches in both directions were empty except for a local who exercised his camels every morning in the low slant of sunlight that appeared over the mountains of Saudi Arabia across the water. The swimming was brilliant – warmer than Devon in July – and we found a dusty township a couple of hours along the coast that felt like the perfect film set for a spaghetti western. Dogs sprawled in the dirt. Tatty palm trees stirred in the wind off the sea. An old man dozed in the shade. There was absolutely no one else around.

We'd buddied up with a Swedish couple, footloose travellers like ourselves, and we found a Korean restaurant within walking distance for nightly helpings of Szechuan curry and Egyptian beer. After the last couple of weeks, it was a kind of idyll, a stolen moment, timeless and unpeopled, but there was a TV in the restaurant and nights when the owners were watching Al Jazeera you couldn't avoid the latest horror pix coming out of Gaza. The relentless Israeli bombardments. The evident use of white phosphorous. Kids hideously burned by this

evil stuff carried shoulder high through the wailing crowds to waiting ambulances. These ambulances, it turned out, drove west to the Egyptian border. The nearest hospital which had the facilities to cope with them was in a city called El Arish. El Arish was just up the road.

To be this close to a developing war crime was a very sobering experience. As a student I'd spent three long summers in a kibbutz in Northern Israel, not because I was Jewish but because Israeli kibbutzim offered board and lodging in return for eight hours work a day and was by far the cheapest way of putting a decent distance between you and the UK.

The kibbutz I happened across was called Shamir. In 1966, when I first arrived, it was three hundred metres from the Syrian border. The following year saw the surrounding Arab nations massing to crush Israel, only to suffer an astonishing reversal in the Six Days War. I was one of tens of thousands of Western kids who volunteered for that war in the belief that it somehow mirrored the cause of Republican Spain in the thirties. The fighting, of course, was over by the time that my mate and I arrived and we spent a very frustrating summer working off our martial fantasies in the apple orchards of the Hula Valley.

We were, nonetheless, on the very edge of history. The border with Syria had moved dozens of miles east over the brief course of the war and during the long hot afternoons, once our work on the valley floor had finished, Steve and I would climb up the rocky heights behind the kibbutz and prowl amongst the shell-blasted barracks and trench works once occupied by the Syrian army. There were minefields everywhere, and it paid to keep to the taped pathways that had been swept by the Israeli engineers. There were rabid dogs up there, too, and an Israeli friend at the kibbutz, freshly returned from service in Sinai, lent us his Uzi submachine gun and a spare magazine in case the dogs had a go at us.

All this was deeply satisfying. The storm had passed on but there were still faint whiffs of sulphur in the air. Later, the kibbutz was to lend us a truck and a driver and we spent a weekend in Jerusalem, touring parts of the city only recently off-limits to Israelis. The long,

increasingly bitter residue of that war was to poison the neighbourhood for decades to come, turning Israel into the pariah of the Middle East. This slow, remorseless drift to the right had created an Israeli that was unrecognisable to the likes of Steve and I, and forty years later it felt odd to be sitting on an empty beach in Sinai, trying to imagine the mind set that could lob shell after shell into the teeming chaos of the Gaza Strip. It was impossible to watch the TV images that were coming out of that undeclared war and not feel the kind of helpless anger that sparks a book.

I took that anger home. We nailed the ferry back to Aqaba and next morning flew up to Amman. The flight took forty minutes. From 27,000 ft, sitting on the left of the aircraft, you could see the drift of smoke pluming out over the Mediterranean. Beneath that smoke was the Gaza Strip and it was then, or shortly afterwards, that a sentence drifted into my mind on which I was to hang an entire novel. My notebook was tucked into the back of the seat in front of me. Lin lent me her pen. *Faraday was asleep...* I wrote, *...when he went through the windscreen.*

This was one of those rare break-through moments that trigger everything that follows. We had a two-hour wait at Amman for the flight back to Heathrow. By the time we joined the queue for boarding, I had the entire book mapped out. Faraday and Gabrielle would be taking a one-week birding break in Sinai. One night, on the ride back to the hotel, the local driver would lose control on a bend. Faraday, asleep without a safety belt, would be badly injured in the crash that followed. Still unconscious, he'd be rushed to the nearest hospital.

The hospital would be at El Arish. Over the days that followed, waiting for her partner to regain consciousness, Gabrielle would prowls the neighbouring wards, doing her best to comfort the wounded kids shipped in from nearby Gaza. One girl in particular – I eventually called her Leila – would catch her eye. Leila appeared to have no one left in the world after an Israeli shell killed the rest of her family. As the enormity of this crime became clear, it would fall to Gabrielle to make good at least a little of the damage. By the time Faraday finds himself in convalescence, she's determined to bring Leila back to the UK for

specialist medical attention. And then adopt her.

Back in Devon, I worked on the rest of the plot. Still on sick leave, Faraday is all too aware that something has changed.

*At the Bargemaster's House, perched on the edge of the greyness that was Langstone Harbour, Faraday was becoming aware that his life was slowly slipping out of focus. He was beginning to develop an obsession with doors. He needed to close them quietly, deftly, measuring the exact effort that went into the push, savouring the soft kiss as the door seated into the frame. He tip-toed from room to room, longing for the coming of dusk, embracing the gathering darkness like a long-lost friend. On wet nights he cherished the whisper of rain against the French windows, and lay for hours on the sofa, listening to the wind, his mind a total blank.*

*One morning, with a jolt of surprise, he realised that he was knotting and unknotting his hands in the most unlikely places (the bathroom, for instance, while he stared uncomprehendingly at the tiny array of waiting toothbrushes). He also started to talk to himself, recognising the low mumble that dogged him from room to room as his own voice. In his more rational moments, he put most of this down to the accident, inevitable aftershocks from Sinai, but what was more unexpected was a growing sense of helplessness, of his mind playing tricks beyond his comprehension.*

*As the days and nights went by, he didn't seem to be able to rid himself of the same thought, the same memory. It came back time and time again: a man on a horse he'd glimpsed briefly, in the middle of the night, from the window of the hotel where he and Gabrielle had been staying in Aqaba, days before the accident. The horse had appeared from nowhere, the clatter of hooves waking him up. He'd gone to the window and watched the man on the horse galloping back and forth across the dusty parking lot, tugging hard on the reins. The man had looked angry. He'd carried a stick, slashing left and right at the empty night air. And then he'd disappeared. The breeze from the Gulf on Faraday's face had been warm, a kind of balm. But what remained was the sense of bewilderment: why the horse? At that time*

of night? And what was this man doing there, riding from nowhere to nowhere? So violent? So manic?

This was bizarre enough, a tug on his wrist from which he couldn't shake himself free. But then, towards the end of this brief convalescence, he came across notes to himself that he must have left around the house, all of them recent. He couldn't remember why he'd written them in the first place, nor what function they served, but the fact that they were there, that they existed at all, was frankly weird. They read like the jottings of a stranger passing by, a voice he couldn't recognise, and as his grip on reality slackened he sensed that he was becoming a spectator at the feast of his own undoing. Stuff was happening – puzzling stuff, troubling stuff – and he hadn't a clue what to do about it. Should he go back to the doctor and ask for medication, some magic pill that would bring his world back into focus? Or should he drive over to Major Crime, knock on DCI Parsons' door and plead insanity? He simply didn't know.

Then came the morning when he awoke to find blood all over the pillow, Hanif's blood, still warm from the accident. Propped on one elbow, aghast, he tried to reach for Gabrielle to tell her what had happened but Gabrielle wasn't there. Worse still, when his gaze returned to the pillow, the blood had gone.

"Mad", he whispered to himself, slipping deeper under the duvet.

The dreams, if dreams they were, got worse. He was back in the hospital in El Arish, trying to explain to an old man with no head that everything would be OK. Then, inexplicably, he was crouched in a hide beside the Dead Sea, his binos steadied on the body of a child. A pair of crows stalked nearby, occasionally pecking at the child's eyes. Images like these awaited him night after night. And the best part of a bottle of Cotes-du-Rhone simply made them worse.

Finally, the morning he was due to return to work, his mobile began to ring. He was groggy, exhausted, wiped out by another night with his demons. Gabrielle, he thought at once.

"Boss? Is that you?" It was D/S Jimmy Suttle. Something horrible had kicked off on the Isle of Wight.

That something horrible turns out to be a fire that has destroyed an old farmhouse. The farmhouse belongs to a mate of Bazza Mackenzie's, a hopeless drunk called Johnny Holman. This was the name of the successful bidder in an auction after a Lord Mayor's dinner inn Exeter I'd attended some months back. The prize was to be a star role in my next book, though whether the real Johnny Holman knew what he was letting himself in for I rather doubt. In any event, firemen combing through the smouldering remains of Monkswell Farm find four bodies. Thus the call from D/S Jimmy Suttle.

Sending Faraday to the Isle of Wight was, in the end, to prove a kind of death sentence though at this point in time I didn't know it. More importantly, I needed to bind one theme – the gathering threat to Faraday's sanity – to the other – the equally gathering threat to the remains of Bazza Mackenzie's business empire. The latter mattered greatly, not least because Winter's very survival was also at stake.

I made some phone calls. One of them went to Andy Harrington. He confirmed that Pompey street prices for the laughing powder were plunging. Eight quid would now buy you a wrap, enough for four lines. The purity was shit (less than 40%), yet another sign that the bottom was falling out of the cocaine market. A second call to an accountant friend suggested that Bazza could be in even deeper trouble. Property prices were continuing to implode across Europe and the consumer bubble, inflated by years of easy credit, had well and truly burst as the banking system went belly up. So if you'd put your eagerly-washed moolah into bricks and mortar, or anything on the High Street, then you were probably staring disaster in the face.

This was bad news for Bazza, but good news for me. What if Pompey's canny businessman had salted away a stash of 95% Peruvian flake against exactly this kind of train crash? What if he'd physically lodged the taped-up blocks of cocaine with his old mate Johnny Holman, paying him to babysit the toot at his farm on the Isle of Wight? And what if that self-same stash had disappeared in the aftermath of the fire? Two million quid's worth? *Gone?*

Winter would naturally be tasked to sort all out all this aggravation, only too aware that Bazza would only tell him what he needed to know

- yet more proof that he was flying blind in ever-worsening weather.

*Now, draining the last of the coffee, Winter was still brooding on this latest development. The last couple of years had taught him never to expect the whole story from Bazza. The key to his world was power, keeping the upper hand, and the currency he dealt in was information. He gave it to you in tiny parcels, carefully weighed, forever keeping the tally in his head. Who knew what. Who'd said what to whom. Who owed him. Who didn't. Winter, who'd always had a very similar MO, had been amused at first. It had felt like a game and there'd been days when he'd definitely stolen an advantage or two. But lately, this last year especially, he'd begun to tire of watching his back, of interpreting and re-interpreting the most casual asides, of studying the man's body language for clues to the real story. Wearing a blindfold, as he'd once told Bazza, does nothing for your sense of humour nor for your self-respect. And so here he was, stumbling around in the dark again, while his boss laid plans to take over the whole fucking city.*

*Was it really worth it? Sweeping up after a bloke who simply refused to establish any sensible ground rules? Who vested so much faith in his own judgement? Who appeared to believe that no Pompey door could resist the weight of his shoulder?*

*In truth, he didn't know. He'd got used to the money and the lifestyle, and in the shape of Marie and maybe even Stu Norcliffe, he'd found real friendship. But all of us, he told himself, are tiny whirling fragments in the teeming chaos of Bazza's busy little brain and there was something slightly Roman in the realisation that he might face the down-turned thumb at any moment. The prospect of that kind of endgame, the pitted brick wall at the end of the cul-de-sac, was beginning to haunt him. If not Bazza, he thought, then someone else might be in charge of the firing squad. Maybe Willard. Maybe Faraday. Maybe, God help him, Jimmy Suttle.*

With Winter off and running, and Faraday trying to get on top of a complex and challenging investigation, the time had come to find out a



little more about burns surgery. Decades back, in the wake of my drugs horror movie, *Better Dead?*, I, my first wife Jane, and a couple of friends, John East and Ian Dillow, had set up a charity we called Project Icarus. Icarus was framed to bring folk down to earth about a variety of self-inflicted home goals including the damage inflicted by drug addiction, booze, and smoking. These films did OK, sometimes better than OK. At the same time I was making broadcast documentaries for ITV and one of these took me to a Salisbury-based plastic surgeon called Jim Laing, an immensely charismatic Scot who quickly became a good friend. One consequence of *Life By Misadventure*, the documentary we made together, was an agreement to make another film, targetted on young mums with small kids. The result was *Scald*, which was adopted nationwide by organisations in the pediatric community.

Jim sadly died from a brain tumour but his son, Hamish, followed in his footsteps and I knew that by 2009 he'd become a leading voice in his field. Ten minutes on the internet told me he was now a consultant surgeon at the Welsh Centre for Burns and Plastic Surgery. Who better to tell me what might lie in wait for the tiny figure still recovering in El Arish?

Hamie couldn't have been more helpful. We caught up by e-mail and he gave me an introduction to a fellow consultant, Eunen Tiernan, who ran the Salisbury Burns Unit where I'd first met Jim Laing.

We talked on the phone and I drove over to Salisbury. Eunen turned out to be a slim, soft-spoken Irishman with a quiet self-deprecatory wit. I'd already pinged him Leila's story on e-mail and he described exactly what would happen once she'd been medivac'd out of El Arish. Leila, he said, would look like a little Egyptian mummy when she first arrived. Scalding lumps of white phosphorous would have burned through layers of tissue to the bare bone and the bandages which covered her torso would be oozing fluid. There'd be a smell, too, the stench of rotting meat, and the little girl would be crying in her pain and bewilderment. Faces she didn't know. A language she didn't understand. And the guarantee of days of pain yet

to come.

Over the next hour or so, Eunan talked me through a variety of medical procedures. How he'd remove dead and infected tissue. The steps he'd take to preserve as much breast development as possible. How important it was to try and lessen the inevitable contractures that had already turned her tiny hands into claws. The work that Eunan and his team would be doing over the next month or so would largely determine the scope and reach of her life as an adult and I left Eunan's office with a profound respect for the small miracles he was able to fashion from lives so abruptly wrecked.

Heidi Lewis was a sister on Eunan's unit, a tall, attractive career nurse with a mass of wild blond hair and a passion for Chelsea FC. She gave me a tour of the unit and a glimpse of the ways you could try and soften the impacts of a hospital stay on very young children. They had a huge supply of soft toys and shelves of DVDs for the TV but in the end, she said, it came down to close contact. "We'd love her," she said. "We'd sing songs together, we'd look at fish in the fish tank, we'd do puzzles, and above all we'd make sure we found someone to translate for us."

Finding a translator, someone who spoke Arabic, was – on reflection – an obvious move to make but the moment Heidi mentioned it I knew exactly where it would fit in the developing jigsaw of the plot.

Gabrielle would have found a wealthy donor to fund all the expenses of flying Leila to the UK, and keeping her here in Heidi's unit. Some of that money would also pay for a professional translator, ideally a woman who knew Gaza well. This woman, a Palestinian, would spend more time with Leila than anyone else, maybe even sleeping in her room, and quickly a bond would thicken between her and the little girl. Gabrielle would be spending as much time as possible with Leila but her lack of Arabic would be a definite handicap. As week followed week, Gabrielle would therefore be aware that Leila – the little girl she wanted to adopt and make her own – was slipping away.

Here's the moment Faraday and Gabrielle are reunited at the Salisbury B&B where Gabrielle is staying. She's been in El Arish with

Leila. Faraday has been on the Isle of Wight, trying to make sense of the four charred bodies in the remains of the farmhouse. His attempts to raise Gabrielle on the phone have largely come to nothing.

*Faraday waited. The wind tasted of rain again. Far away, the hoot of an owl.*

*The front door opened. Gabrielle was wearing a dressing gown he didn't recognise. She must have been in Salisbury since getting back from El Arish, he thought.*

*"Mind if I come in?"*

*He stepped inside without waiting for an answer. She closed the door behind him. No kiss. No hug of welcome.*

*"This way, cheri."*

*He followed her up the stairs. There was a smell of furniture polish and cheap air freshener. Cold.*

*Her room was tucked away in a kind of annexe. She'd left the door open. The single bed was unmade, light from the corridor throwing soft shadows over the rumpled sheets. Gabrielle's rucksack lay abandoned on the chair beneath the window. Various bits of clothing were draped over the back of the chair. On the shelf beside the bed, a copy of The Seven Pillars of Wisdom. Faraday had found it in a bookshop in Aqaba. She'd nearly got to the end.*

*Gabrielle turned the light on and gestured round. She was camping here, she said. She was always apologising to the cleaner for the mess but she hadn't had time to do anything about it. Most nights, like now, she just wanted to go to bed. Faraday nodded. The message was clear. He was an intruder.*

*He sat down on the bed, looked up at her. He wanted to cry. Knew he mustn't.*

*"I've missed you." He said.*

*"I know. I'm sorry."*

*"You know?" He blinked. None of this made sense. The not phoning. The not being there. The not sharing this secret life she'd suddenly decided to make her own.*

*She sat down beside him. He felt her hand over his. It was the*

touch of a mother or a nurse, a small obligatory gesture of comfort. He took his hand away. Anything but this, he thought.

He looked sideways at her, two passengers on a train going nowhere, robbed of conversation, robbed of everything.

"So what's happening?" he said. "What's going on?"

"You know what it is, cheri."

"I don't. I should but I don't. So why don't you tell me?"

He felt a small, hard pebble of anger deep in his belly. He tried to ignore it. Failed completely.

Gabrielle had pulled the dressing gown more tightly around her. She looked pale and thin but the bruising from the accident had gone. Leila, she explained, had been back to the operating theatre for another change of dressings. The staff were lovely to her, the doctors too, but they didn't hide how serious her condition was. Burns were horrible, especially these kinds of burns, and the phosphore had made things worse. The Israelis, she said, were racaille. They'd killed without mercy, without even thinking about it, and the worst of it all were kids like Leila, hundreds of them, marked for life, inside and out.

"Racaille." she repeated. "Scum."

Faraday felt himself nodding. He'd never seen her like this, so angry, so intense. Maybe this explained a little about the last month or so. What had happened in Gaza had swamped her little boat. She was oblivious to everything else.

"So what's going to happen?" He said again. "As far as Leila is concerned?"

"Sais pas, cheri." She was staring at her hands. "She has a translator with her, Riham. She talks to Riham a little. Riham says she wants to go home."

"Of course. She would."

"But to what? Gaza est tout demoli. Wrecked. Her family, too. Morte."

Morte. Dead. Gone.

"All of them?"

"I think so."

*"Do you know that?"*

*Her head came up and she looked at him.*

*"You talk to me like a flic,"*

*"I am a flic."*

*"Alors." She shrugged. "So maybe she has an aunt, an uncle, I don't know. If she gets better..." She shrugged again. "Sais pas..."*

*Faraday knew how important it was to keep talking. On the floor, half hidden by a Medecins Sans Frontieres T-shirt, he'd spotted another book. Arabic for Beginners.*

*"So what's the option?" he said quietly. "If she doesn't go home?"*

*Gabrielle shook her head. She didn't want to answer, didn't want to think about it. She went to the hospital every day. She was there first thing in the morning to be with Leila when she woke up. In the afternoon, when she slept, she'd take the bus down into Salisbury. She'd found a little delicatessen where she could buy haloumi cheese and sweetmeats and figs, tastes the little girl would recognise, little treats that might help build a bridge between them. The staff had a special fridge to keep stuff like this. Leila liked stories, too.*

*"Who reads to her?" Faraday's gaze had returned to the book on the floor.*

*"Riham. You know what Riham means in Arabic, cheri? It means a fine rain that lasts forever. Isn't that beautiful?" For the first time, she was smiling. Faraday wanted to kiss her. Instead, he took her hand. It was cold, stiff, unresponsive.*

*Faraday asked her how long Leila would spend in the unit. Gabrielle frowned. The doctors were saying a month at least, probably longer. It depended on the anti-biotics they were giving her. The burns were badly infected. She was already weak.*

*"And afterwards? When she comes out of hospital?"*

*Another silence. Then another shake of the head.*

*"I don't know, cheri. You tell me."*

*"Me? Me tell you?"*

*"Oui." She nodded and then summoned a small, brave smile.*

*"She could be ours, cheri. This little girl."*

I knew these characters – especially Faraday and Winter – well. I'd entrusted countless books, countless plots to their tender care and they'd never let me down. Give Faraday a scene like this, and he practically wrote it himself. My job as the author was to get the incidental details as right as I possibly could.

Aside from the small print of burns surgery and the long convalescence that followed, I also needed to find out a whole lot more about the distinctive way a fire can destroy a thatched farmhouse, about the kinds of evidence the four charred bodies would present at post-mortem, and about the bureaucratic nightmare that the process of inter-country adoption can so easily become. For each of these challenges I had to lay hands on people who knew this stuff from the inside, who'd built whole careers on their expertise.

John Ashworth, bless him, convened another brainstorming session at Netley to which he invited a Crime Scene Manager and a fire officer from the Arson Task Force. We spent a very happy (and productive) afternoon exploring every investigative possibility. Some of these lines of enquiry, in plot terms, proved to be dead ends, leading nowhere fictionally useful, but others seeded ideas that bloomed in later chapters. I'd already had a long session with a fireman in Devon, Adge Tilke, and he'd explained the thermal logic that made thatched fires so difficult to fight. Now, driving away from Netley with my notebook full of yet more detail, I felt the quiet warmth that comes from the knowledge that a book will work.

Back in Devon I had a meet with Debbie Cook, the pathologist. I'd already shared the plot with her by e-mail and we'd agreed to meet at a rather upmarket café at a shopping complex called Darts Farm, near Topsham. The place was packed and Debbie had arrived with a stack of extremely graphic post-mortem photos which she spread across our table.

Over tea and chocolate sponge, she showed me how an intense fire can lock your forearms the way a boxer does, the so-called "pugilistic attitude", and looking at her photos of charred bodies I was reminded of a little girl Heidi had shown me in the Burns Unit, her fingers similarly contracted. By now, Debbie was describing the post-

mortem procedure, the way she had to slice through to the back of the trachea, looking for soot below the level of the vocal chords. Should she find it, she'd regard the dark tell-tale trace as evidence that the person had been alive when the fire started.

"Here..." she produced another photo, "...this is what I mean."

It was at this point that an elderly couple at the next table decided to bale out. The woman, far too nosy for her own good, had finally twigged that she was stealing a look at human flesh and bone. Her husband helped her to the door.

By now, unusually, I'd started writing the first draft. I'd acquired a stack of research about the impact of the Israeli bombardments on civilians in Gaza, plus a book about the Israeli occupation of the West Bank. The latter, *Witness in Palestine*, was the work of a young American, herself Jewish, who had lived and worked amongst the Palestinians for eight long months. Her name was Anna Baltzer and by chance we'd run into her in Jordan. She had the relentless focus which generates certain kinds of rage, and her book was an eye opener. There was no way I could offer anything remotely similar but the knowledge of where this book had come from never left me. Some acts are beyond both comprehension and forgiveness. The destruction of Gaza in January 2009 was one of them.

But *Borrowed Light*, as I was now determined to call it, belonged to Faraday and Winter. My challenge, in designing the plot, was to put both of them under immense pressure and then stand well back to see how they coped. Here's Winter exploring the ruins of Monkswell Farm some weeks after the fire. It's nearly midnight and he's still trying to figure out what happened to all that cocaine.

*Winter was still gazing at the hole. He could hear the soft moan of the wind in the trees. After a moment or two he turned back towards the house. Before he left he couldn't resist a look inside. He switched on the torch again and headed for what must have been the back door. The door itself had been torn off its hinges and tossed to one side, presumably by the firemen. Winter stepped inside the thick cob walls. Above his head, through a lattice of charred beams, he could see a*

star or two. The smell was stronger here, the smell that reminded him of the bin liner he'd collected from the old lady, and underfoot he could feel the greasiness of the sodden ash.

The beam of the torch settled on a pile of rubble that must once have been a kitchen. He recognised the bones of a fridge. An Aga. A circuit board that might have belonged to a telly. The torch found the gleam of a bottle, then another, then a third, and Winter tried to imagine what kind of life Holman must have lived here. The booze, in the end, had done for him. And now this was all that remained.

Winter shivered, all too aware that his own life was close to a disaster of this magnitude. Not because he'd necked too much Stella or hooked up with an Estonian tom, but because he'd let the likes of Bazza Mackenzie get into his head.

As a working cop, he'd always known that a decent criminal was always ahead of the game. With half a brain and access to the right advice, you'd be stupid not to make decent money. That's the way it worked. That's the way society was set up. You filled the courts with infant shoplifters and drugged-up inbreds, hit the right performance targets and took promotion with a smile on your face. Pretty soon you were fluent in bollock-speak and counting the weeks until you hit your thirty and could cash in that big fat pension. That's what the blokes were doing more and more. That's what got them through.

But Winter hadn't done that at all. No. Winter had been stitched up by the likes of Willard and Parsons and hung out to dry on a u/c operation that had nearly got him killed. Therapy had arrived in the shape of Bazza Mackenzie. With him had come good money and a few laughs. Bazza had trusted him. They'd all trusted him, the whole family. His name was dog wank among the people he'd left behind, but Winter hadn't cared a toss. He was cruising. He was at 30,000 feet. He had money, respect, a nice car. He even had stolen shares in Misty Gallagher.

So where had it all gone wrong? And what the fuck was he doing in some khazi of a crime scene, mud all over his Guccis, trying to figure out what to do next? He glanced up then ducked his head, feeling a flurry of rain, knowing that there were decisions, important decisions,



*he couldn't afford to postpone any longer. Staying with Bazza Mackenzie would put him away for the rest of his life. Either that or something worse.*

*He shook his head, trying to rid himself of a growing sense of helplessness, following the torch beam back towards the door and the darkness beyond.*

So much for Winter. He'd always been a resilient character, someone I could depend on to talk himself out of life's tighter corners, and even at this stage he showed no real signs of flagging. Unlike Faraday.

By half way through the book, I realised I was writing about a man going mad. This wasn't something I'd pre-planned. Indeed, it wasn't even something I *wanted* to happen. I liked Joe Faraday. I respected him. We'd spent a lot of time together in my head. He was excellent company: reflective, wise, humane. He liked a drink, too, and so did I. But something was happening to him, something utterly beyond my control, and there was no way I could avoid the consequences.

This moment, I now realise, was the crux of the entire series, the point – as it were – of no return. From here on, my sole responsibility was to shepherd this man to an end of his own choosing. Not mine, his. On the page, I began to take care of him the way you might take care of a cherished friend. As did D/S Jimmy Suttle when he phoned their mutual boss, DCI Gail Parsons, and told her that Joe Faraday was in a bad way.

*Parsons was on the Isle of Wight by late afternoon. She stepped into the SIO's office without knocking. Faraday looked up, surprised to see her. After the best part of an hour tidying up, his desk was bare.*

*"Boss...?"*

*"How are you, Joe?"*

*"Fine." He said vaguely. "You?"*

*She smiled at him, uncertain, then sat down.*

*"Seriously...?"*

*“Seriously.”*

*“So how’s it going?”*

*“How’s what going?”*

*“Everything...Gosling...” She frowned. She’d just noticed the Operation Gosling white board on the wall. Yesterday it had been littered with reminders, phone numbers, names, and the odd scrap of heavily underlined information that badged major enquiries force-wide. Now, like the desk, it was wiped clean.*

*Faraday was telling her that everything was fine, just fine. Suttle, he said, had been kindness itself.*

*“How?”*

*“Little ways, important ways. It’s not easy, sometimes, boss. You know something about that lad? He understands.”*

*“Understands what?”*

*“Me. This. The Job. Pretty much everything, really.”*

*Faraday leaned back and gazed up at the ceiling. He had a tiny smile on his face, as if he’d been privy to some joke or other, but then his head came down again and Parsons recognised the glint of tears in his eyes. He stared at her, forcing the smile wider. The tears were running down his cheeks now and she stood up, edging her bulk around the desk, putting her arms around him, telling him everything was going to be alright. Then the door opened, admitting Suttle.*

*“I’ve got a car round the back, boss.” He said quietly. “You want me to give you a hand?”*

What follows doesn’t belong in this account, except that it took us to Paris. I’d asked Marie-Caroline, my editor at Masque, where I might set a key scene towards the end of the book and after she’d listened to my brief exposition of the plot she directed me to the area around the Parc Monceau, in the 8th arrondissement. Lin and I took the Eurostar from St Pancras. In Paris it was October, cold, wet. The Parc Monceau lies at the heart of a prosperous area of tall, handsome houses, discreet security, and Phillipino maids sweeping leaves into neat piles for the wind to scatter again.

We found the park without difficulty, and settled on a bench. Lin

had bought some nuts and within minutes we'd attracted a small circle of squirrels. The thin drizzle had stopped by now and I sat back, gazing up at the greyness of the clouds, trying to imagine Faraday sitting at this very spot. Maybe he deserved a little TLC. Maybe I'd give him better weather.

*In the park Faraday settled peaceably on a bench, wishing he'd brought something for the marauding squirrels. There were joggers doing circuits, and Faraday shut his eyes, waiting for the soft steady lap-lap of their trainers on the wetness of the sandy path. There were young Asian women too, pushing prams. They looked Thai, and Faraday had a brief vision of himself and Gabrielle on the bus in the mountains, the hot afternoon they'd first met. He could remember exactly what she was wearing, every detail, and he remembered too the single ring she wore on her left hand. It was thin, silver, delicate. Once they were living together she'd taken it off, and he never saw it again.*

*He tipped his head back, enjoying the warmth of the sun on his face. Could you ever really know another person? Could you ever be sure about them? Be certain? Could you make a little parcel of yourself and hand it across for safe keeping? Or was this single act of trust, so absolute, so reckless, bound to end in betrayal? He didn't know, and the realisation that he didn't much care any more brought a smile to his lips. He'd once met a Buddhist monk on a ferry on the Mekong river who'd talked of the lightness of being, of the mistake we make in looking for significance in a waste of emptiness. Maybe he was right, he thought. Maybe that's where this journey ends. Back in the mountains. Back on the bus. Back in the steamy heat of the jungle.*

Where was Faraday's journey to end? Believe it or not I still didn't know, but we were due back in Devon the following day and I knew I had to have the first draft finished by the end of the week. Life had finally ganged up on Joe Faraday and one way or another, he had to do something about it.

But what?

### *Thirteen*

A couple of years back, I'd already decided to bring the series to an end with Book Twelve. For one thing, I was beginning to be aware that I felt a stranger in Portsmouth. The city was changing fast in ways I didn't entirely understand and that easy kinship which had warmed the pages of the earlier books had gone. I was having to try harder and harder to keep my finger on the Pompey pulse, and from our new perch in the West Country – more than a hundred and thirty miles away – that was a very big ask indeed.

The other problem, probably more important, lay with my two central characters. To be blunt, they were getting way too old for active service. Back in 1999, when Malcolm Edwards led me to the gates of crime fiction, I never anticipated the series would go beyond three books. Hence I settled for two experienced cops with forty plus years service between them. More than a decade later, to my astonishment, they were on the edge of retirement. Given the importance I'd always placed on authenticity, on getting the small print *right*, I had to drop the curtain on their world.

Faraday, as it happens, had spared me the disappointments of retirement. The end of *Borrowed Light* left the faintest possibility that I might be able to bring him back from the dead but the moment I

finished the book I knew in my heart that he'd gone. His passing was a profound shock. In some ways I found it difficult to understand what I'd done. Was this really the guy I'd shared eleven books with? Could he really have done something so rash, so selfish, so seemingly out of character? But then the grim logic of events pressed back in on me and I realised that his death, however much I regretted it, had been inevitable. Life had ganged up on Joe Faraday and left him with no choice but to end it.

The reactions to the final pages of *Borrowed Light*, once the book had been published, astonished me. I'd no idea how unusual it was to have the hero die before the series came to a formal close but I began to get e-mails from all over the world. Some read like condolences. These were people who'd liked Joe Faraday and wanted to mourn his passing. Others came from readers who appeared to have been traumatised. They'd raced through the latter half of the book, often in the small hours, and couldn't believe what I'd done. There was a sense of betrayal, that I'd somehow been careless with a character that was precious to them, that I'd dropped him on a tiled floor like a piece of prized china and simply walked away, leaving them with the broken shards of someone they'd cherished. One fan, a woman from California, went further. A member of her family had recently committed suicide. I had no right to trespass into this territory. The final pages of *Borrowed Light* had undone the months of therapy that had offered so much comfort. She felt bereft again, completely shattered, and that was my fault.

I always answer every e-mail. In the case of this lady, as in many others, I did my best to explain that characters who work on the page have a voice, an integrity, and a direction that owes nothing to me, the writer. They make their own decisions. Some, like Paul Winter, cope. Some, like Joe Faraday, don't. That, sadly, was a fact of life and when I wrote that no one was more shocked than me by Faraday's suicide, I meant it. Was I surprised by what had happened? In a way, yes, though in retrospect I believe it was inevitable. Did I miss him? I did, terribly. Could I have done anything about it as the end of *Borrowed Light* hove into view? Sadly, no.

He did, though, deserve a decent send-off, and the first seventy pages of the final book, already titled *Happy Days*, belonged to my departed series lead who'd also become a good friend. Ulyana, incidentally, is a Russian actress who has become J-J's partner, while Lizzie is Suttle's wife.

*It rained on the morning of Faraday's funeral. Suttle had taken the day off and while Ulyana helped Lizzie get food ready for the Bargemaster's House, he drove J-J to some of the places he knew Faraday had loved. Favourite of all was the tip of Spice Island, a spit of shingle that curled around the bottom of Old Portsmouth. Here, beside a pub called the Still and West, was a waterside area that had recently been tarted up to help put Flagship Pompey on the map. Faraday hadn't much liked what the planners had done but nothing could spoil the real magic of the place.*

*Faraday had come here often, especially when an investigation was threatening to hit the rocks. Most of the time he'd be alone, nursing a pint beside the railings, staring out at the incessant comings and goings on the harbour, but sometimes he'd take Suttle along, quizzing him about this or that aspect of a case, wanting to know how much weight the intel could bear, wondering whether they were heading in the right direction, abruptly breaking off to direct Suttle's attention to a lone cormorant, inches above the racing tide, heading out towards the Solent and the open sea.*

*It was that quiet, dogged, relentless professionalism, spiked by moments of childlike excitement, that hung in Suttle's memory. He wanted, somehow, to get just a little of this magic across to J-J but in the absence of Ulyana, for all J-J's lip-reading skills, he knew it was beyond him. Instead, they stood in the drizzle, doing what Faraday used to do, just gazing out across the water until it occurred to Suttle that there was no need for explanations. J-J, wholly his father's child, instinctively understood. Moments later, as if to prove the point, he took Suttle's elbow and steered him into the pub. He had a wet £10 note in his hand and brooked no arguments. Drinks were on him.*

*By early afternoon, the rain had cleared. Rags of cloud scudded in*

from the west and the sunshine glittered in the puddles of standing water on the long drive out of the city. At J-J's insistence, Lizzie and Suttle rode in the limousine behind the hearse. Lizzie had parked Grace with her mum, who lived at the top end of the city. The cortege took the motorway north across the harbour and J-J sat bolt upright, his eyes never leaving his father's coffin. His face was a mask. Suttle had borrowed a suit from a mate who was about J-J's size but it was far too big across the shoulders and made him look like a refugee. In some respects, Suttle thought, the effect was fitting. Like his dad, J-J was one of life's windfalls.

The crematorium was at Portchester, on the mainland. The previous funeral had just finished and a thin straggle of mourners were filing away towards the Garden of Remembrance to inspect the flowers. Faraday's cortege turned into the drive. Outside the Chapel of Rest, there were faces Suttle recognised, chiefly the hardened smokers, lingering in the sunshine before going in. At the sight of the approaching hearse, they ducked into the entrance and disappeared. Suttle had toyed with trying to arrange some kind of modest guard of honour for Faraday's last journey but Ulyana had told him that J-J was against the idea. He didn't want any fuss, she said. He just wanted to say goodbye.

The hearse came to a halt. Suttle and Lizzie joined J-J and Ulyana as the undertakers hoisted the coffin onto their shoulders and began the slow carry into the chapel. To Suttle's quiet satisfaction, there was a good turn-out. The chapel wasn't big but the pews on either side of the aisle were packed. He reached for Lizzie's hand, nodded at a face or two, suddenly overcome by what this moment really meant. Faraday was no longer amongst them. The man he'd trusted, admired, respected, liked, had gone.

Spaces had been saved for them at the front of the congregation. Suttle stood aside, letting Lizzie squeeze into the pew, then took his place beside her. Mercifully, no one could see his face. He swallowed hard and reached for the Order of Service he'd had printed specially. On the front was a photo of Faraday and a much younger J-J, lifted from J-J's lap top.

Father and son were squatting together on the stony strip of foreshore in front of the Bargemaster's House, Faraday's arm around the child's skinny shoulders. J-J, barely seven, immensely proud of himself, was holding a tiny green crab by one leg, showing it to the camera, while his dad's attention appeared to have been caught by something else. For Suttle, it had been impossible not to wonder what that something was but he now realised why J-J had treasured the shot.

Only last night, through Ulyana, he'd told Suttle that there were two things he'd always remember about his dad. One was his bigness and his smell, both of them an enormous source of comfort, and the other was his curiosity. Dad, he said, was always on the look-out, always interested, always nosy. And for that alone, he'd loved him.

A Schubert impromptu came to an end and a moment of silence was broken by the vicar. The music for the funeral had been Ulyana's choice. She remembered Faraday telling her about solo piano pieces that had touched him at a concert he and Gabrielle had once attended and she'd selected two impromptus plus an extract from a Beethoven sonata, telling J-J that his dad would have loved them. Reflective, beautifully paced, intensely moving, the music was perfect.

The vicar extended a welcome to the congregation. Suttle, half-listening, let his mind drift away. He'd noticed Winter at the back of the chapel and he wondered whether he shared this sudden gust of overwhelming loss. Then, his opening remarks complete, the vicar invited Detective Chief Superintendent Willard to come forward and make his tribute.

Willard was in full dress uniform. Dwarfing the vicar, he spoke without notes. Faraday's death, he said, had come as an immense shock. Not because he was so young. Not even because those that knew him might have sensed that all was not well. But because an event like this, so sudden, so final, was a terrible reminder of how easily the best qualities in a man could be lost.

Faraday, he said, was one of the finest detectives he'd ever had the privilege of serving alongside. He was utterly honest, immensely hardworking, and never let anything stand between himself and the



best possible outcome. He never hogged the limelight. He kept himself away from the usual swirl of canteen gossip. But best of all he could read other people like a book. In the service of justice, said Willard, this was a huge gift, but as a human being it made Faraday someone pretty rare. The man listened. The man understood. The man reached out. And – in all three respects – he was a lesson for us all.

Suttle felt an audible ripple of agreement behind him. This was powerful stuff. He'd no idea Willard had it in him. But Willard hadn't finished. Turning to J-J, on behalf of his father's ex-colleagues, he offered the most profound sympathies. In his view, it was a mark of Faraday's uniqueness that J-J had lost more than a father. Because, when it had mattered most, Faraday had been his nipper's sole contact with the world. He'd brought him up single-handed. He'd built a bridge to the strange, mute happenings around him. He'd been there until the time had come for J-J to flee the nest. And only then had he let himself get on with a life of his own. That had demanded a degree of love, and commitment, and selflessness all too rare in today's world. And for that, Joe Faraday, we salute you.

He turned to the coffin, bowed his head, and then returned to his seat. Suttle could hear someone sobbing a couple of rows back. Lizzie's hand was knotted in his. For the second time in ten minutes he was close to losing control himself. Beautiful, he thought. Spot-on.

A couple of prayers followed. Then it was his turn to squeeze out of the pew and join J-J beside the coffin. Last night the pair of them had been rehearsing for this moment. A bottle of Cotes-du-Rhone had helped. Now, Suttle produced the carefully-folded text from his jacket pocket, nodded to J-J, and began to read.

"The Eagle...", he announced uncertainly, "...by Alfred Lord Tennyson."

He made the mistake of glancing up. A sea of white faces, blurring again at the edges. He fought to regain control of himself, aware of J-J beside him, his bony hands outstretched, already miming the opening line.

Suttle bent to the text again and began to read.

*“He clasps the crag with crooked hands  
Close to the sun in lonely lands  
Ringed with the azure world, he stands.  
The wrinkled sea beneath him crawls,  
He watches from his mountain walls,  
And like a thunderbolt he falls.”*

*Suttle looked up. J-J's performance had got wildly out of sync and he was already sprawled at Suttle's feet, the fallen thunderbolt, but it didn't seem to matter. The soft applause came from Ulyana. The vicar picked up the cue, joining in. Then everyone else did the same, uncertainly at first, then louder and louder before Suttle helped J-J to his feet and silence returned.*

*Back in his pew, Suttle closed his eyes. Lizzie reached up and kissed him. There were more prayers, a reading or two, and then an address from the Vicar about the welcome awaiting Faraday on the other side of the grave. Over the last week Suttle hadn't managed to find anyone who had a clue whether Faraday was a believer or not. It was yet another side of the man that would remain a mystery. Yet just here, in this small moment of time, Suttle sensed that there'd be someone, something, some presence that would take care of him. Not because he'd been to Sunday School or collected for Oxfam or found some other way to stack his credits up. But because he'd been a good man. The vicar appeared to agree.*

*“Like all of us, Joe Faraday is a child of God.” He said. “May the Lord be with him.”*

*The service came to an end minutes later. The curtains closed on the coffin and Suttle found himself listening to another Schubert impromptu, sunnier this time. J-J was standing at the end of the pew, closest to the aisle. His task now was to lead the mourners out of the chapel but he couldn't take his eyes off the curtains. Suttle was trying to get inside his head, trying to imagine what this must feel like. Did he view this as some grotesque conjuring trick? Would he expect to meet his dad again in the Garden of Remembrance? Or had he managed to make some kind of peace with Faraday's going?*

*Suttle didn't know and seconds later it didn't matter because*

*Ulyana had taken J-J firmly by the elbow and was steering him down the aisle towards the door. Out in the sunshine, people knotted together, seemingly lost for words. Several of the woman gave each other a hug. Then a D/I, Cathy Lamb, appeared from nowhere and took Suttle to one side. As a D/S, years ago, Suttle knew she'd been a favourite of Faraday's. He'd served under her himself as a rookie detective on division and understood why. She was solid, and warm-hearted, and had turned out to be a brilliant skipper.*

*Looking at her now, Suttle realised she'd been crying. Her eyes were puffy and her mascara had streaked. He fumbled for a handkerchief and then mumbled something about not having brought one.*

*She waved the apology away.*

*"That poem was unbelievable", she said. "Joe would have been really proud of you."*

This sequence, oddly enough, sparked as many e-mails as the final pages of *Borrowed Light*. This may be fanciful on my part but there was almost an element of forgiveness in these messages. Readers found Joe's funeral deeply moving, relieved that the man's sheer humanity had won a quiet round of applause from people who'd mattered in his life. Those people, for the record, included me. And, yes, I still miss him.

Without Faraday, I'd been a little nervous of pushing *Happy Days* forward but I needn't have worried. Books without tension seldom work but there was more than enough unfinished business between Winter, Suttle and Bazza Mackenzie to bring the series to a storming end. In the dead months following the completion of *Borrowed Light*, I knew that somehow I had to find a way of revving Bazza up until he self-combusted, an exploding ball of fiery gases against the darkness that is Pompey. Quite how I was going to this remained a mystery until I began to tune into all the pre-election chatter in the media. It was February, 2010. New Labour's grip on power was visibly weakening. The Tories and the Lib Dems were scenting blood. Quite suddenly,

picking up on all this stuff, the solution was obvious. When the inevitable election was finally called, Bazza Mackenzie was going to stand for parliament.

This is a guy, remember, who'd been determined to step onto the public stage and recent books had charted the steps he'd taken to distance himself from his colourful past. The bid to organise a huge Jet-Ski Grand Prix event for his dead brother. The creation of the Tide Turn Trust to sort out the city's wayward youth. Dreams and schemes for putting himself forward as Mr Pompey, should Portsmouth become one of the UK cities to elect a Lord Mayor. Each of these little adventures had taken Bazza a little closer to where he'd always wanted to be: at the very top of the pile of movers and shakers who held the city's future in their hands. With a general election in the offing, I told myself, he'd become increasingly obsessed with a single word: Westminster.

But this manic bid for serious political authority had to work on the page. There are two parliamentary constituencies in Pompey: Portsmouth North and Portsmouth South. Born in Copnor, Bazza would naturally regard himself as the northern constituency's favourite son. The seat was currently held by Sarah McCarthy-Fry, whom I happened to know. Sarah had thrived under New Labour, ending up with a ministerial role in the Treasury. All the sources I talked to in the city suggested she'd have a fight to retain the seat, and when I made contact with a view to shadowing her through a busy and probably fraught election campaign, she regretfully declined. Very wise.

By now it was early spring. The hot money was on a May election and the party machines were cranking up, readying themselves for the hustings. I began to research the technical and legal steps Bazza would have to take before his candidacy was accepted. The electoral process was far more complex than I'd imagined, and the paperwork was daunting, but there was nothing I could find to rule out a Bazza bid for a seat in parliament, and in the shape of strict limits imposed on electoral expenses, there appeared to be scope for all kinds of mischief. Money, to Bazza Mackenzie, was the key that could unlock any door and he'd never been the kind of guy to pay much attention to

the rules.

As the start of the campaign approached, the notion of letting Bazza loose on the Pompey electorate felt more and more promising. Given the nature of the man – his vanity, his ambition, his sheer determination to win whatever ruck life put in his way – I could already anticipate countless fictional opportunities. Bazza would be in the fight to give the other candidates a severe kicking but the man was also canny enough to know that his campaign had to be truly mould-breaking to attract the kind of attention – both local and national – that he felt he needed. To make this credible on the page I had to design this campaign with an eye to every detail way before Gordon Brown went to the Palace and fired the starting gun for the four weeks of political mayhem that would inevitably follow.

My ally and chief consultant in this wonderful game was my son Jack. Like me, Jack is a political junkie. He loves the small print of politics, and the kind of grotesques it seems to attract. He reads widely and is totally fluent in the kind of bollock-speak that passes for communication in Westminster and Whitehall. His weekly blog, a post-mortem on BBC 1's *Question Time*, is a delight to read and has rightly attracted a big following (check it out on [questionabletime.com](http://questionabletime.com)).

I put the proposition in a long e-mail. Jack had read some of the books and was familiar with the cast list. Bazza, I said, was close to going broke. His commercial empire was in meltdown, and Winter – at last – had decided that the time had come to deliver his boss to the Men in Blue in return for the guarantee of a new identity and the promise of a fresh start abroad. This would deliver him from the looming threat of a European Arrest Warrant being prepared by the Spanish after in-depth enquiries into the killing of Brett West and his German girlfriend.

With some reluctance, Det Chief Supt Willard had agreed. The masterplan – Operation *Gehenna* - called for Mackenzie to be pushed to the brink by a brand new call on what little was left of his war chest. This had to be something he couldn't do without, something that had really taken his fancy, and in the shape of the coming battle for Portsmouth North, we were looking at the perfect opportunity. In a

situation like this, I told Jack, Bazza couldn't help himself. He was in there to win. He was in there to screw all the other numpties. It would cost whatever it cost. Given his mounting financial troubles, this was a guy in serious denial.

Jack was intrigued. *Hoy hoy, he wrote. I really like this storyline. It has legs and you could have some real fun with it. All good in my book. As for Bazza cultivating an on-line following, well that's pretty much standard procedure these days. Here's how these things work....*

There followed a witty analysis of the e-arrows Bazza would be readying for his electoral bow. How he'd set up a sockpuppet account on Facebook. The ways he'd squeeze Twitter for maximum political advantage. How important it would be to keep his own website a bit rough, littered with typos, in order to maximise his prime asset which – in Jack's view – was his authenticity. *This guy's homegrown Pompey, he wrote. And the look has to match.*

More suggestions followed. Maybe a flirtation with the big aggregators like Digg or Reddit. Definitely the launch of various internet forums, bespoke stuff carefully designed for specific voter-groups. One might be white, male, and playfully racist, appealing to the Squaddie Vote. Another, maybe accompanied by YouTube mini vids, would target students. These were guys, Jack pointed out, who'd probably never seen a voting booth in their lives and Pompey was full of them. Potentially, you'd be looking at thousands of their crosses against Bazza's name on the ballot papers come polling day. Nice one.

Much of this stuff was way outside my comfort zone (aggregators? sockpuppet accounts?), and more to the point, it would be way outside Bazza's, too. *Under no circumstances is Bazza allowed in front of an internet connection without supervision, Jack wrote. Very wise. He needed, at an early stage, a little helper. So who was that to be?*

In the event I came up with not one but two characters. The first was a guy called Leo Kinder, a political consultant who'd already made a brief appearance in *Borrowed Light*. Winter arrives at Bazza's

house to find this stranger sitting at the dinner table. The subject of the conversation? Bazza's ambitions to become Lord Mayor.

*Mackenzie was deep in conversation with a sleek thirty-something across the table. Designer jeans, crisp white collarless shirt, winter tan, a hint of stubble. Leo Kinder.*

*Winter found himself a chair and sat down. Mackenzie pushed the bottle of Remy Martin in his direction.*

*"Leo here thinks we're sitting on a gold mine. And he thinks we're about to cash in big-time. Isn't that right, Leo?"*

*"Politically..." Kinder nodded. "Yes."*

*Kinder favoured Winter with his soft brown smile. Winter hadn't trusted him from the off. Too smooth. Almost feline.*

*"How does that work, then?" He heard himself say.*

*"Politics is all about catching the tide, Paul. Just now I get the sense that tide's running in our favour. You know something's happening when papers like the Guardian come knocking on your door. This stuff's viral. If they take us seriously then word spreads."*

*Winter loved the way he said "us". A couple of months ago, no one in this house had ever heard of Leo Kinder.*

*"GQ, mush." Mackenzie was grinning fit to bust. "Leo says they're up for a big piece for some spring special they're planning. And it doesn't stop there, eh Leo?"*

*"By no means..." the smile again. "Since the Guardian, the phone's been ringing non-stop. Everyone wants a piece of what Baz has to say. I'm telling them to form an orderly queue at the door. This stuff's free. It doesn't cost us a cent. Plus editorial is the best kicker of all. You can't buy this kind of coverage, no way. It's the old story, Paul. The right time and the right place. Like I say, all we have to do is ride the tide."*

Kinder would be the natural choice to be part of Bazza's larger political ambitions, and Jack agreed. But what we still needed, he said, was someone maybe a bit younger, a bit geekier, someone who knew every inch of the internet and had the skills to do the heavy

lifting at the tekkie end. This someone turned out to be Andy Makins. Here he is in Bazza's campaign War Room, arriving for interview. Jack, I hasten to say, was responsible for his wardrobe.

*Andy Makins appeared at the door within seconds. He was small, thin, pale, intense, with thick-lensed glasses and a scary side parting, a greasy lick of hair falling over one eye. He wore a Ramones T-shirt under an ill-fitting tweed jacket he must have picked up in a charity shop and had wound a Palestinian scarf around his scrawny neck. The black jeans had definitely seen better days but the lime green Nike Hi-tops looked brand new. He stepped into the room, unpeeled the scarf, and then blinked at the faces around the table. Kinder, Winter sensed, couldn't believe his eyes. His brand of political consultancy had little room for a fashion statement this muddled.*

This was beginning to feel real. More to the point, it was fun. Way back in the Nineties, I wrote a stand-alone thriller called *Heaven's Light*, another fictional bid to push politics to the limit in Portsmouth. The plot called for a new grassroots party. I called it *Pompey First*. It did well at the hustings, pushing the case for the city to declare UDI, and I saw no problem in resurrecting it. Maybe Bazza had read my stand-alone. Maybe he'd happened on the phrase in his own good time. Either way, *Pompey First* became the vehicle that would – Bazza was convinced – take him to Westminster.

Now my tyro politician needed to wade into the swamp of local issues that was Portsmouth North. These included the on-going issue of the Navy's two planned super-carriers (*would they ever happen?*), a controversy over the hiring of specialist advisers for New Labour's Building Schools for the Future scheme (*who needs all this consultant bollocks?*), a closure threat to Hilsea Lido (*ripping the fucking heart out of Pompey*), and the incontestable fact that Pompey South had scored 1000% more Lottery funding than Pompey North (*why are we always sucking the hint tit?*).

This was strong stuff, tinder for the bonfire of Bazza's political



dreams, and my next challenge was to draw up an official manifesto. All the other political parties had one. Why not *Pompey First*?

Bazza hands the task to Leo Kinder. After consultations with Andy Makins, he agrees that your average punter is bored witless with pages of promises that will never be kept and comes up with four snappy bullet points.

***Pompey Pride:*** *oddles of dosh to spruce the place up, full resus for Pompey Football Club, bid to stage boxing events for the 2012 Olympics.*

***Pompey Passion:*** *opening the doors to Chinese and Indian investment, thereby turning the city into an international growth-hub.*

***Pompey Fast:*** *sorting out the transport chaos, EU-funded tram system, water buses everywhere, tunnel to Gosport under the harbour.*

***Pompey Plus:*** *new discount card accepted by outlets city-wide distributed free to paid-up members of Pompey First.*

Along with the manifesto, Kinder develops a set of display posters which will, come the election, be plastered all over the city. Each of these features The Candidate in a variety of his favourite settings: Fratton Park, the naval dockyard, Spinnaker Tower, Gunwharf, plus the much-loved Hilsea Lido.

The ten strap lines go as follows:

*Pompey First...because the last lot screwed up.*

*Pompey First...time to get real.*

*Pompey First...because enough is enough.*

*Pompey First...before it's too late.*

*Pompey First...because the rest of them are rubbish.*

*Pompey First...because we're worth it.*

*Pompey First...because we deserve better.*

*Pompey First...getting the state out of your face.*

*Pompey First...unpicking the stitch-up.*

*Pompey First...last, and always.*

Jack thought this was a laugh, and so did I. But as the election campaign crept nearer it began to dawn on me that we could bed this

madness down in real life, making it both funny and weirdly credible on the page, carrying the reader along on a building wave of enthusiasm for Pompey's madcap candidate.

*Pompey First*, aka Bazza Mackenzie, was where you'd put your cross if you'd pretty much given up on everyone else and wanted – with the minimum of inconvenience – to simply make a point. For how many people would that be an irresistible option? And why hadn't it happened in Pompey before? In truth, it had. A while back, a character called Docker Hughes had stood for parliament but his candidacy had imploded under the strain of the campaign trail, and he'd finally limped in with a handful of votes. That wasn't going to be Bazza's fate. No way.

Bazza, though, will be fighting demons. Not simply his fellow candidates, not only the army of media scribblers waiting for his first gaffe, but Paul Winter and the Men in Blue, quietly plotting his downfall.

Here's an early indication of where *Happy Days* will be headed. If you listen very hard, you can hear the jaws of Operation *Gehenna* beginning to close.

*Gordon Brown called the general election on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> April. He drove to Buckingham Palace, asked the Queen to dissolve parliament, and returned to Downing Street to launch the New Labour campaign. That same morning, oddly enough, Bazza Mackenzie got some very bad news.*

*He was in the War Room with Kinder, Makins and Winter when his mobile rang. All eyes were glued to the live BBC news feed on the big plasma TV Kinder had installed. Gordon Brown was emerging from Downing Street to address a mob of reporters.*

*Mackenzie bent to his phone. Already visibly irritated, his frown deepened. He brought the conversation to an end and sat back to watch Gordon Brown at the microphone. The election was to take place on 6<sup>th</sup> May. The future, he said, is ours to grasp, a future fair for all. So let's get to it.*

*"Too right, mush." Mackenzie got to his feet. He caught Winter's*

eye and jerked his head towards the door. They needed to talk. Now.

Upstairs in his office, Mackenzie siezed the phone and punched in a number. When he was especially tense he had a habit of perching on the very edge of his seat. Just now he hadn't even sat down.

"Julie? I need to talk to Conrad."

Winter knew at once what this was about. Conrad Whittiker was Mackenzie's point man at the bank, the guy who oversaw his various accounts, the senior manager who made all the key credit and loan decisions. Whittiker was a very bad man to cross. Especially now.

Mackenzie was at full throttle. The moment Whittiker came on the phone he let fly. Some muppet had been on about a couple of mortgage payments. She seemed to think there were insufficient funds available. The payment had therefore been blanked. What the fuck was going on?

Whittiker spoke at some length. Winter watched Mackenzie's face darken.

"That's bollocks, Conrad, and you fucking know it. I've put hundreds of thousands your way, squillions of fucking quid, and now you tell there's a problem? What fucking planet are you people on? First you trash the economy, get it so totally fucking wrong we're all back in the Stone Age, monkeys up fucking trees, then you take it out on people like me. Some of us have a living to make, believe it or not, and you tossers don't make it fucking easy. So do us a favour, eh? Sort this nonsense out."

He put the phone down and stared at it, daring it to ring again. It was Winter who broke the silence.

"Well...?"

"You don't want to know, mush."

"I do, Baz. I do."

"They're threatening to withdraw the overdraft."

"Threatening?"

"They've done it. Bang..." His fist hit the desk and made the phone jump. "...just like fucking that. No consultation. No warning. These guys think they own us all."

"They do, Baz."

*"Bollocks. You believe that? You really believe all that bullshit? Jesus..." He stepped away from the desk and stormed towards the window. Out on Southsea Common, Winter could see a couple of girls flying a kite. One was very pretty. He thought of saying something but knew there was no point. Bazza, in a mood like this, was beyond reach.*

*"Great fucking timing." He muttered. "This has to be a spoiler, doesn't it? There has to be some evil fucker behind all this, some Tory cunt. The Labour lot haven't got the brains and the Lib Dems are away with the fairies. So who wants to hurt us, mush? Who is it?"*

*He was talking to himself, a man cornered by months of spending money he didn't have, a man desperate to put a name and a face to this monstrous twist of fate. In Bazza's world, as Winter knew only too well, the blame never settled at his own door.*

*"Which account is it, Baz?"*

*"All of them, the lot. He's telling me there's nothing left in the pot."*

*"We knew that."*

*"He means his pot. We're half way up the fucking mountain, mush, and he's just cut the rope. Mortgage payments, direct debits, cheques, credit card payments, the lot, finito. Not another fucking penny, he says. Not one."*

*"So what do we do?"*

*"We look elsewhere. We work the phones. We call in favours. Stu's got a quid or two if it really comes to it. Marie, too."*

*Winter said nothing. If Bazza was relying on his wife and son-in-law, things had to be really bad.*

*At length, there came a knock at the door. It was Leo Kinder. For days, in anticipation of this morning's news, he'd been planning a big press conference to launch the Pompey First campaign. The London papers would be sending stringers. TV and radio were standing by. The News were talking about a big splash on the front page plus a feature inside. This was the raw meat of politics. Even Kinder, Mr Cool, couldn't mask his excitement.*

*"You want me to make the calls, Baz?"*

*Mackenzie was still at the window. He didn't turn round.*

*“Of course I fucking do.” He said.*

Ahead of the moment when I had to start the first draft in earnest, Lin and I took a month off in late September to scout a couple of locations. We took a series of trains down to Trieste at the top of Adriatic, spent a couple of days in nearby Venice, and then boarded a bus out of Italy, heading for the Istrian peninsula. This is Croatia. Because the Croatians had yet to join the EU, the reach of the European Arrest Warrant didn't extend this far. Winter would therefore be safe here living under an assumed identity and our job was to find him somewhere agreeable to settle down.

Our search came to an end at the seaside resort of Porec. In late September, the place was virtually empty. Rocky promontaries on both sides of the huge bay were green with pine trees. During the summer, the town would be awash with tourists – most of them German and Dutch – and a browse through properties for sale at a local agency confirmed that Winter would have no problem picking up a decent house for the kind of money he'd realise on the sale of his Gunwharf apartment. The estate agent confirmed that a number of visitors had chosen this area for their retirement and we came away with an armful of likely prospects.

That night, in a deserted local bar, Lin and I were having a pint or two and watching the football when she caught my eye.

“Paul Winter survives Book Twelve, then?” she said. “Is that what all this is about?”

I glanced across at her, reaching for my glass.

“No idea.” I said. And I meant it.

From Porec we took a bus to the port of Rjeka and hopped onto the season's last ferry south, towards Dubrovnik. The ship was virtually empty, a handful of vehicles down below on the car deck and maybe thirty or so passengers. We rumbled through the scatter of islands that dot the Dalmatian Coast, and changed boats at Split. Ten hours later we were late getting into Dubrovnik, leaving us four minutes to make the neighbouring bus station for the day's last coach

down to Montenegro. We sprinted along the quayside. I knew from the internet that the coach company was called Blu Lines. A blue coach was approaching. We stood in the middle of the road, waving it down. Stopping was less hassle than running us over. Very Montenegrin.

Montenegro itself was startlingly beautiful, a rugged coastline falling sheer into the blueness of the Adriatic. The road wound inland, following a fjord as far as the ancient town of Kotor, where we got off. I had room in the book for a Russian oligarch, a rich businessman who dresses like a student, lives on a palatial yacht, and spends his life funnelling development money into places like Montenegro. The guy's name is Nickolai Koch. From my reading, I'd figured that Koch would favour making base camp at a place like this and one glance at the waterfront beneath the ancient town walls told me I was right: a neat line of fuck-off motor yachts, rich men's toys, tied stern-first to the quayside.

We stayed out of town, in a primitive room let by the family next door. The sons had some kind of motor business and beaten-up old rental cars came and went through the night. Lin thought they were smugglers or drug dealers, and she was probably right.

Next day we went back to the coast. The biggest developments are around the city of Budva and there was Russian money wherever you looked. Gym-fit bodyguards in wrap-around shades waiting at the kerbside in black 4x4s. Sleek businessmen with drop-dead girlfriends dallying over a coffee and a slivovitz on the terrace of the nearby café-bar. And acres of quick-set concrete beneath a forest of cranes disfiguring every headland in sight. The smell of serious money, I decided, was the smoke drifting inland from the bonfires of rubbish burning on the construction sites. No one seemed to care. They were too busy turning wonderful views into yet another private fortune. Winter would have to come here, I decided, and get himself into serious trouble.

Not that life was easy for him back home. I started writing the week we got back to Devon. A month later, I was storming towards

the end of the book. By now, Winter had moved in with Misty Gallagher and the pair of them were making active preparations to decamp to Croatia.

*The thought of Misty took Winter out of the city. By now, she would have acquired a mountain of cardboard boxes from the Londis down the road. For an hour or so, he'd be only too happy to lend her a hand, a downpayment on this new life of theirs. By the time he was back at the hotel, with luck, he'd have worked out a line for Mackenzie.*

*It was a glorious day and traffic was heavy onto Hayling Island. Winter drove past thicket after thicket of blue Tory posters, musing about where the election had taken them all. The masterplan for Gehenna had been his and in theory it was a beautiful piece of entrapment.*

*Bazza, to no one's surprise, had generated the perfect storm for himself. That trademark mix of recklessness, mischief, ambition and raw nerve had led him to take a tilt at Pompey North. At the start of the campaign, to everyone's surprise, he'd done extremely well. There'd even been rumours that the mainstream candidates were beginning to worry. But then, as Winter had predicted, it was all starting to unravel until Pompey's favourite drug baron found himself in a trap of his own making. At this point, according to Gehenna's script, it would only take a tiny push to topple Bazza over the edge. That push, fingers crossed, would come any day now. After which Bazza would lose it completely.*

*Did Winter still believe it? Was he still signed up to Gehenna? He knew the answer was yes. Because, God help him, there was no alternative.*

*He was already turning in through Misty's gate when he saw the Bentley. It was parked beneath the tree at the edge of the drive. The kitchen was at the back of the house and Winter could see Mackenzie swivelling at the breakfast bar, alerted by the crunch of gravel outside.*

*Shit.*

*Bazza, he knew, was at his most dangerous when nothing in the*

world seemed capable of upsetting him. He met Winter at the door, big smile, pumping handshake, the smell of fresh coffee on the go, even the tang of grilling bacon.

Misty was in the kitchen, reaching for an extra plate. As Winter had predicted, the kitchen was littered with cardboard boxes. Whatever else awaited them in Porec, they wouldn't be short of glasses.

"Mist tells me you're off?" Bazza couldn't have been more affable.

"Yeah." Winter shed his jacket. "That's the plan."

"Bit of a surprise, though, eh? Mist assumed you'd told me."

"Didn't want to get in the way, Baz. No distractions. Not this week."

"Well done, son. Good darts. Everything for the cause, eh?"

Winter nodded. He was wondering about the surveillance guys. Were they parked up outside? Somewhere down the road? Had Bazza clocked them? He felt physically ill. Mackenzie was playing with him, goading him, setting him up. This was beyond dangerous. He had to do something. He had to somehow seize the initiative, restore – at the very least – a little self-respect.

"If you want the truth, Baz, I've had enough. I said I'd see you through and that's what I've done."

"See me through to what, mush?"

"Thursday. Election day. Whatever happens after that, you're on your own."

"Is that right?"

Misty, still attending to the bacon, caught the change in tone. She glanced over her shoulder towards the breakfast bar. Winter could see the anxiety in her eyes. He turned back to Mackenzie.

"Look on the bright side, Baz. You can flog this place now. Fuck knows, you need the money."

Mackenzie ignored him. He was standing by the window now, gazing out.

"We've been a good team." He said softly. "What do you think, Mist?"

"Me and you, Baz?"



*"Me and Paulie here."*

*"The best, Baz. Totally the best."*

*"That's what I think." He stepped back from the window. "So what do you think..." There was no warmth in the smile. "...Paulie?"*

*"I think it's been fun. And like I say, I think the time's come to call it a day."*

*"Shame."*

*"Definitely."*

*"No regrets?"*

*"Plenty."*

*"Like what?"*

*"Like...." Winter frowned, then shook his head. "No way, I'm not going there."*

*"Where, Paulie?" He'd come close now. The smell of mint of his breath was something new. All that campaigning, Winter thought vaguely. All those strangers you suddenly had to talk to.*

*"Ketchup or brown sauce?" Misty was trying to head Bazza off. It didn't work.*

*"It's Westie, isn't it? It's fucking Westie that's done it for you? Him and that little German girl of his? Couldn't hack it, could you? Couldn't just accept it was something that happened by? People get hurt, mush. That's life. People fuck up. They get in my face. And then they get hurt."*

*"You had them killed, Baz. You had them blown away. That's not hurt."*

*"Whatever. It doesn't matter, mush. It's gone, it's over, unless..."*

*"Unless what?"*

*"Unless I think different."*

*"I'm not with you."*

*"No you're not, mush, are you? And I tell you something else. You're fucking bricking yourself. I can smell it, mush. Any minute now you're going to do what old men do. You're going to dump in your kaks. And you know why? Because I frighten you shitless. Good. I'm glad. Because you fucking deserve it."*

*He stared up at Winter for a long moment, then headed for the*

door. *En route was an empty cardboard box. He gave it a kick, then turned round and strode back. His finger was in Winter's face.*

*"I don't know what's going on in that evil little brain of yours, mush, but you listen to me. I'm saying this once and once only. If you even think of dobbing me in with the Filth, you'll end up like Westie. Except worse. Much worse. Westie was lucky. Bam. End of. For you, mush, I can dream up something really tasty. We understand each other? No? Then talk to Misty here. She knows exactly what I'm about."*

*He turned on his heel again and left. Moments later came the slam of the front door. Winter watched the Bentley execute a savage turn, gravel kicking from the rear tyres. Then Mackenzie was gone.*

*Winter turned round to find Misty behind him. She was offering him a sandwich.*

*"Can you manage a couple, pet?" She did her best to smile. "Be a shame to waste them."*

I loved this scene. It smacked of exactly the kind of despair that would settle on a man like Winter once the chemistry between him and his employer had evaporated. He'd had three good years with Mackenzie. He'd pulled a number of strokes, all of them badged with his trademark cunning, and he'd been well paid for his efforts. He'd established a really close relationship with a woman who still turned heads all over the city, a woman who'd until recently been Mackenzie's long-term mistress, and it hadn't bothered Bazza in the slightest. But now, barely a couple of chapters away from the end of the series, he was staring disaster in the face. How was he going to finesse this latest catastrophe? What artful ploy could he dream up to simply stay alive?

At this point, absolute truth, I hadn't got a clue. The denouement to the entire series lay around the corner and I found myself, not for the first time, in the hands of my surviving lead character. Winter will find a way, I told Lin. Or not.

December 2010 was a bit of a landmark for a couple of other

reasons. Anticipating that I'd shortly be out of contract, I'd been trying to get Orion to sign up to a spin-off series set in the West Country. My plan called for young D/S Jimmy Suttle to get himself a job with the Devon and Cornwall Constabulary. Specifically, I wanted him to move west with his young family and join one of Devon and Cornwall's Major Crime Investigation Teams. This would unlock a series of stories right across the force area, which is huge.

I tried to bait the hook with the sheer range of settings on offer – anything from the drug-infested badlands of Torbay to generations of family vendettas across the high pastureland on the edges of Dartmoor – but Orion's interest was barely luke-warm. In mainstream publishing, cutting edge crime fiction tends to flourish in the black hearts of our major cities. Why would Orion waste their time with thatched cottages and cream teas?

I did a detailed synopsis set around the rowing club in Exmouth, where we lived. Both Lin and I had become passionate about offshore rowing, joining a crew of like-minded guys who were happy to notch up more than 25 kilometres a week and celebrate in the pub afterwards. I was new to club culture and this collection of Alpha males (and Alpha women) was a bit of a revelation. After a while I began to dream up a plot. It revolved around a successful self-made businessman found dead on the walkway beneath his £1m penthouse apartment. This is a guy who's joined the club, learned to row, bought a brand new boat, plus the crew to go with it. One of these guys probably killed him.

In essence this was a riff on the classic English country house murder, with a series of sub-plots that were altogether more contemporary. It was also to be an in-depth study of a young marriage in crisis, a development thickened by Suttle's realisation that his wife – Lizzie – appears to be having an affair with the prime suspect. I had every confidence in my pitch, and Simon liked it too, but there was still an in-house resistance to baling out of Pompey. The books were selling well. Why not stick with a formula we know works?

We'd arrived at a kind of impasse when I took a call from Conrad Williams, my TV and film agent. He's part of the Blake, Friedmann

agency. My first two contracts – for stand-alone thrillers – had been negotiated back in the Eighties by Carole Blake and she'd done a fine job, but things had got tricky after Book Four (not Carole's fault) and I'd finally baled out to conduct my own negotiations with Macmillan. For the move to Orion, in the mid Nineties, I'd acquired another agent but this relationship had only lasted four books before I once again declared UDI. Throughout this period, though, Conrad had continued to look after the film and TV side, negotiating a series of option deals on a number of books. They never came to anything but that was by no means his fault.

Now he had a suggestion to offer. A bright young in-house agent by the name of Oli Munson had started making a name for himself and Conrad thought that now might be the time for us to meet. Oli, he said, was my kind of guy and with things maybe a bit sticky with Orion then he might be just the chap to turn things around. The three of us met for lunch in London a week or so later. Conrad was right. Oli and I talked for a couple of hours, and on the basis of an agreed forward strategy I was more than happy to sign up.

My stock at Orion seemed to rise overnight. Maybe it was Oli's growing reputation, or the simple fact that I'd acquired an agent again, but negotiations bustled to a conclusion. The deal Oli brokered was more than satisfactory and I found myself wondering why we hadn't met earlier.

But there was even better news to come. Less than a week later, Conrad was back on the phone. In the summer, I'd received an e-mail from a guy called Jacques Salles. Jacques was a producer with a Paris-based TV production house, GETEVE. He was enquiring whether or not the French rights were available to the Faraday series. He'd read a couple of the books and had been much taken.

At the time, I'd sent a polite acknowledgement and passed the inquiry on to Conrad. This kind of stuff happens more often than you might imagine and mostly comes to nothing. How wrong I was. In the intervening months, Jacques had drawn up a contract for two books, nailed down a screenwriter, attached a couple of top actors to the project, and won an expression of warm interest from France 2, a

leading non-commercial TV channel. Conrad was now looking at the contract and telling me to sit down. Once we were happy with the terms, which evidently needed a tweak or two, filming would begin.

Geteve would be adapting two books, *Angels Passing* and *Cut to Black*, for TV release in the late autumn. Le Havre would be the new Pompey and filming was to start in February, which was just a month away. Naturally Lin and I had a standing invite to pop across for a couple of days on location with the cast and crew. This was, Conrad assured me, a bit of game-changer.

And he was right. We went over in mid-February, staying with Ann and Dom LaFosse, friends we'd made during earlier visits to Les An cres Noires, the Havre crime fest. We met Jacques and the crew, watched interminable retakes on a patch of dockside wasteland in the cold, bright sunshine, then retired for a long location lunch. This we shared with Jean-Marc Barr and Bruno Solo, the French incarnations of Faraday and Winter ("Winkler" in the Geteve version), and it was obvious at once that these two actors had understood the spirit and the thrust of the original books.

The afternoon was scheduled for a couple of scenes in the middle of the city, and I watched the Havrais traffic piling up behind the temporary roadblock while Jean-Marc and Bruno did their stuff. How come my Pompey fantasies had come to this? How can Faraday and Winkler bring an entire French city to a halt? That evening, back at Ann and Dom's, we drank lots of beer, ate prawn curry, and watched the first leg of the epic Champions' League double-header between Arsenal and Barcelona. Seldom, I thought, does life deliver days like this.

The following afternoon, we returned to Pompey on the ferry. Jacques, who would have made a fine Smiley in *Tinker Tailor*, had given me copies of both scripts and I spent the crossing reading them. The scriptwriter, Bernard Marie, had done a fine job, managing to compress the story while preserving the essence of both the plot and the characters. The contrast with Tiger Aspect's treatment of the same bit of Pompey turf couldn't have been starker. Jacques and his team had respect for the material, as well as countless other talents. I was

very definitely in good hands.

DVDs of the finished films arrived in July. By now, *Happy Days* was edited, typeset, and on the way to the printers. Faraday and Winter had picked their way through twelve books and their adventures were over. Except here they were again, reincarnated in Le Havre for the benefit of a French audience. Geteve had thrown a lot of money at the project and it showed.

The performances were magnificent, especially Jean-Marc and Bruno. They'd built the beginnings of a strange on-screen rapport, something you could almost touch, and a little of this had spilled into Faraday's relationship with J-J. The technical direction – the lighting, the camera moves, the sudden changes of pace – were hugely effective and the director, Edwin Baily, had used the Havre locations to superb effect. Like Pompey, this was a rough, sharp-elbowed city, making its living from the oil business and the sea. Refinery flares lit night time sequences and elegant French gulls wheeled and swooped in front of Faraday's bins. The music, too, was superb.

Jacques' movies transmitted on 11th and 18th November. The first pulled an audience of 3.76 million. *Les Lignes Blanches*, the second, did even better with 3.90 million. I couldn't begin to imagine all those French bums on French sofas but I believed Jacques when he said that he – and France 2 – were delighted. They'd be filming two more books after Christmas. And maybe two more after that. Conrad had been right. A definite game changer.

There's a post-script to this story, and I offer it not to make a point but to illustrate what a strange game writing can be. Twelve long years ago, Malcolm Edwards had lured me into crime fiction. It hadn't been an easy gig, far from it, but the characters had grown with the series and I seemed – in the end – to have offered a snapshot of a certain corner of English society over a single decade. That's what people were telling me more and more through their e-mails; that's what had attracted the UK reviewers; and that's what had taken Faraday and "Winkler" across the Channel. Not massive helpings of violence. Not car chases and anal rape. But the minor key, caught,

manipulated, turned to good fictional account, and then put on the page.

After the transmission success of the French films, I sent an e-mail to Orion suggesting that we might be looking at a tasty story. BBC4 was currently building decent audiences with foreign crime, especially the first series of the Danish production, *The Killing*. So how come it took the French to pluck a UK series out of Pompey, reframe it in Le Havre, and score nearly four million viewers?

I never got a reply from Orion but early the following year, in the wake of the hardback publication of *Happy Days*, I had a meet with Brian Oliver. Brian used to be Sports Editor of the *Sunday Observer*. He's a big fan of crime fiction, including the Faraday series, and yonks back he and Ed Vulliamy had found space in the *Observer* to explore the various linkages between my books and the Pompey that turned up twice a month on the terraces at Fratton Park. Now, nine years later, he'd been checking something on my website and come across the news from France. Great story. Might I be up for an interview?

I was. We met at the coffee shop above the Pompey Waterstones after a hugely successful signing for *Happy Days*. I told Brian about our French adventures and what a fine job they'd done. I'd managed to rustle up a DVD of one of the films with English sub-titles. He watched it that night, over a bottle of red, and agreed it was bloody good.

Four days later, this appeared. It occupied the whole of page seven in the *Observer's* main section and – as you might imagine – did me no end of good. The real kicker, though, lay in the first of the readers' comments at the end. All us scribes need a reality check from time to time. And this was to be mine.

### **Pompey meets Le Havre in French TV crime hit**

British writer Graham Hurley's detective duo are proving popular across the Channel

By Brian Oliver



Filming for *Two Cops Down at the Docks*, which is set in the port city of Le Havre.

Graham Hurley has sold more than half a million books and been translated into nine languages. Last Wednesday he was in a bookshop in Portsmouth, where his most popular series is set, signing copies of his 12th and final novel featuring Detective Inspector Joe Faraday and Paul Winter, a fellow detective who becomes increasingly disenchanted with police work and eventually goes over to the other side.

On the same day 100 miles away, a crew of 60 were filming the third of four 90-minute TV adaptations of the Faraday-Winter books. The first two drew impressive audiences of just under four million, the next two will be finished by spring for broadcast at the end of the year and a deal has been signed for numbers five and six.

The rights have already brought Hurley a five-figure sum and “been a game-changer for me”, he said. The cameras were not rolling in Pompey, though. The series is being filmed across the Channel in Le Havre – in French, for French TV. “Le Pompey de Graham Hurley transposé au Havre,” as *Le Parisien* says.

BBC4 and Sky have been widely praised for showing crime dramas from Sweden, Denmark, France and Italy, [and have been rewarded with impressive viewing figures](#). Now Hurley is redressing the balance and exporting his stories. The French have “pinched” one of Britain’s popular fictional detectives and turned him into a *capitaine*.

For years, the former documentary-maker tried to persuade British companies to film Faraday. His work [has been praised by the \*Financial Times\* and the \*Guardian\*](#), and there has been interest, “but it takes years”. As for the French, within two months of contacting Hurley they had signed a contract, found a TV station, chosen actors, appointed a scriptwriter and started filming. “I went over with my wife,” said Hurley. “It was great to see the traffic



stopping in Le Havre for the filming of one of my books.”

Why opt for Faraday and Winter in a country that takes [crime fiction](#) more seriously, and where there are so many writers to choose from? “They told me the books had significant social content and were politically committed,” said Hurley, who is fluent in French and regularly speaks at crime-fiction festivals in France.

Faraday would fit well into one of the gloomy Scandinavian books that are so popular here. He is summed up by Winter in one of the later novels as “dogged by a reputation as a weirdo loner with a passion for birdwatching and a deaf-and-dumb son”. He lost his wife to cancer, is a deep thinker – especially when out looking for a pectoral sandpiper or a black-tailed godwit – badly dressed, anti-consumerist and becomes convinced that, for all the police efforts, society is falling apart and “anarchy rules”. “Family breakdown, substance abuse, domestic violence, crap education – there’s plenty of all of that in Pompey,” said Hurley. “The community is in a state of near collapse. The police are always there to see it first.”

Social workers and young offenders feature prominently in the series and Hurley pays great attention to police procedure – especially the ever-changing guidelines and time-consuming paperwork. It could almost be the detectives themselves complaining through Hurley’s fiction: he has exceptional contacts throughout the Hampshire force.

Winter is also a widower, but he is different – abrupt, pragmatic, jovial, a Stella drinker to Faraday’s Guinness. The real star of the books is Portsmouth, where Hurley lived for nearly 30 years before a recent move to Devon, the setting for a new series on which he is working.

“Without Pompey, the books would never have been written,” he said. The series is set in the 00s and there are constant references to the social problems of Britain’s most populated city, and its “rough, gruff, wry humour”. Portsmouth football club features prominently, and many of the villains are former hooligans. As Dickens’s birthplace, the city was a focus for the bicentenary celebrations last week – but outsiders have not always warmed to it. General James Wolfe wrote in 1758: “The necessity of living in the midst of the diabolical citizens of Portsmouth is a real and unavoidable calamity. It is a doubt to me if there is such another collection of demons upon the whole earth.” The city’s official motto is “Heaven’s light our guide”. The unofficial one, said Hurley, is “If in doubt, have a fight”. He is, he said, “not the most popular man in the tourist office”.

How does this work in France? There is no translation for “mush” (a Pompey term of affection), “scrote” (the opposite) or “scummer” (anyone from Southampton). Can the city be exported? “I was intrigued by the move to Le Havre,” said Hurley. “But they have done a good job. What holds true for Portsmouth also holds true for Le Havre. There are similarities: neither city is fashionable, they are both at the end of the railway line, relatively uncursed by money. Sharp-elbowed places, robust.” Could you move other

English detectives – Morse to Rouen, say, or Rebus to Marseille? “Rebus, maybe yes. But I’m not sure about Morse. You can’t get away from those dreaming spires.”

Jacques Salles, the French director of the Faraday episodes,, titled *Two Cops Down at the Docks*, said: “When I read Graham Hurley’s books I immediately thought of Le Havre. A huge port, the same kind of atmosphere – same causes, same effects.” Salles made an adaptation of a Val McDermid book for French TV two years ago, in two 90-minute episodes. He is excited about doing more of Hurley’s work, and said that the TV audience for the first two was “a tremendous success” because they were up against a hugely popular show on France1. The French treat crime writers, Hurley among them, with great respect and have dozens of literary festivals for *policiers*. “Being from Pompey, at first I thought they were taking the piss,” said Hurley. “The festivals have been a very civilised and civilising experience. I remember a coach load of people from Nantes coming to a festival in a remote town in Brittany, the European capital of pig breeding, and they’d know more about my characters than I did. The housewives love Faraday: they all want to mother him.”

Attending the festivals helped popularise the books – and now, with the TV series, sales in France have risen. Wouldn’t it be ironic if the French TV episodes appeared on BBC4 with subtitles. “Oh yes, that would be good,” said Hurley. “I’d laugh – in French.” Would the people of Portsmouth laugh with him? Maybe not, because Le Havre has a dark secret they will not like – it is twinned with Southampton.



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I am sorry but I have never heard of Graham Hurley and don’t remember ever seeing his books on sale in any bookshop here.

Malcolm Edwards, yonks ago, made a bid to put me and a Pompey-based series up there with crime fiction’s biggest hitters. For whatever reason, in the crudest of commercial terms, it never happened. In my darker moments, which are mercifully few, I wonder whether I’d have been better advised to have gone for something racier, splashier, simpler, more violent, more visceral, more in tune with the ever louder thump-thump of the culture. But then I think of Faraday, the kind of man he was, and I know at once that books like

that were never going to be a serious option. You are what you are. You see the world the way you see it. You write the way you write. And everything else, in Winter's phrase, either sorts itself out or falls flat on its arse. End of.

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